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# V I L L E T T E.

BY CURRER BELL,

AUTHOR OF "JANE EYRE," "SHIRLEY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# VILLETTE.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### AULD LANG SYNE.

WHERE my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell. Whatever she saw, or wherever she travelled in her trance on that strange night, she kept her own secret; never whispering a word to Memory, and baffling Imagination by an indissoluble silence. She may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home, hoping for leave to rest now, and deeming that her painful union with matter was at last dissolved. While she so deemed, an angel may have warned her away from heaven's threshold, and, guiding her weeping down, have bound her, once more, all shuddering and unwilling, to that poor frame, cold and wasted, of

whose companionship she was grown more than weary.

I know she re-entered her prison with pain, with reluctance, with a moan and a long shiver. The divorced mates, Spirit and Substance, were hard to re-unite : they greeted each other, not in an embrace, but a racking sort of struggle. The returning sense of sight came upon me, red, as if it swam in blood ; suspended hearing rushed back loud, like thunder ; consciousness revived in fear : I sat up appalled, wondering into what region, amongst what strange beings I was waking. At first I knew nothing I looked on : a wall was not a wall—a lamp not a lamp. I should have understood what we call a ghost, as well as I did the commonest object ; which is another way of intimating that all my eye rested on struck it as spectral. But the faculties soon settled each in its place ; the life-machine presently resumed its wonted and regular working.

Still, I knew not where I was ; only in time I saw I had been removed from the spot where I fell : I lay on no portico-step ; night and tempest were excluded by walls, windows, and ceiling. Into some house I had been carried,—but what house ?

I could only think of the pensionnat in the Rue Fossette. Still half-dreaming, I tried hard to discover in what room they had put me ; whether the great dormitory, or one of the little dormitories. I was puzzled, because I could not make the glimpses of furniture I saw, accord with my knowledge of any of these apartments. The empty white beds were wanting, and the long line of large windows. "Surely," thought I, "it is not to Madame Beck's own chamber they have carried me !" And here my eye fell on an easy-chair covered with blue damask. Other seats, cushioned to match, dawned on me by degrees ; and at last I took in the complete fact of a pleasant parlour, with a wood-fire on a clear-shining hearth, a carpet where arabesques of bright blue relieved a ground of shaded fawn ; pale walls over which a slight but endless garland of azure forget-me-nots ran mazed and bewildered amongst myriad gold leaves and tendrils. A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows, curtained amply with blue damask. In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral ; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face.

It was obvious, not only from the furniture, but from the position of windows, doors, and fire-place, that this was an unknown room in an unknown house.

Hardly less plain was it that my brain was not yet settled ; for, as I gazed at the blue arm-chair, it appeared to grow familiar ; so did a certain scroll-couch, and not less so the round centre-table, with a blue covering, bordered with autumn-tinted foliage ; and, above all, two little footstools with worked covers, and a small ebony-framed chair, of which the seat and back were also worked with groups of brilliant flowers on a dark ground.

Struck with these things, I explored further. Strange to say, old acquaintance were all about me, and “auld lang syne” smiled out of every nook. There were two oval miniatures over the mantel-piece, of which I knew by heart the pearls about the high and powdered “heads ;” the velvets circling the white throats ; the swell of the full muslin kerchiefs ; the pattern of the lace sleeve-ruffles. Upon the mantel-shelf there were two china vases, some relics of a diminutive tea-service, as smooth as enamel and as thin as egg-shell, and a white centre-ornament, a classic group in alabaster, pre-

served under glass. Of all these things I could have told the peculiarities, numbered the flaws or cracks, like any *clairvoyante*. Above all, there was a pair of handscreens, with elaborate pencil-drawings finished like line-engravings; these, my very eyes ached at beholding again, recalling hours when they had followed, stroke by stroke and touch by touch, a tedious, feeble, finical, school-girl pencil held in these fingers, now so skeleton-like.

Where was I? Not only in what spot of the world, but in what year of our Lord? For all these objects were of past days, and of a distant country. Ten years ago I bade them good by; since my fourteenth year they and I had never met. I gasped audibly, "Where am I?"

A shape hitherto unnoticed, stirred, rose, came forward; a shape inharmonious with the environment, serving only to complicate the riddle further. This was no more than a sort of native *bonne*, in a common-place *bonne's* cap and print-dress. She spoke neither French nor English, and I could get no intelligence from her, not understanding her phrases of dialect. But she bathed my temples and forehead with some cool and perfumed water, and then she heightened the cushion on which I reclined,

made signs that I was not to speak, and resumed her post at the foot of the sofa.

She was busy knitting; her eyes thus drawn from me, I could gaze on her without interruption. I did mightily wonder how she came there, or what she could have to do among the scenes, or with the days of my girlhood. Still more I marvelled what those scenes and days could now have to do with me.

Too weak to scrutinize thoroughly the mystery, I tried to settle it by saying it was a mistake, a dream, a fever-fit; and yet I knew there could be no mistake, and that I was not sleeping, and I believed I was sane. I wished the room had not been so well lighted, that I might not so clearly have seen the little pictures, the ornaments, the screens, the worked chair. All these objects, as well as the blue-damask furniture, were, in fact, precisely the same, in every minutest detail, with those I so well remembered, and with which I had been so thoroughly intimate, in the drawing-room of my godmother's house at Bretton. Methought the apartment only was changed, being of different proportions and dimensions.

I thought of Bedreddin Hassan, transported in his sleep from Cairo to the gates of Damascus. Had a Genius stooped his dark wing down the storm to

whose stress I had succumbed, and gathering me from the church-steps, and “rising high into the air,” as the eastern tale said, had he borne me over land and ocean, and laid me quietly down beside a hearth of Old England? But no; I knew the fire of that hearth burned before its Lares no more—it went out long ago, and the household gods had been carried elsewhere.

The *bonne* turned again to survey me, and seeing my eyes wide open, and, I suppose, deeming their expression perturbed and excited, she put down her knitting. I saw her busied for a moment at a little stand; she poured out water, and measured drops from a phial: glass in hand, she approached me. What dark-tinged draught might she now be offering? what *Genii*-elixir or *Magi*-distillation?

It was too late to inquire—I had swallowed it passively, and at once. A tide of quiet thought now came gently caressing my brain; softer and softer rose the flow, with tepid undulations smoother than balm. The pain of weakness left my limbs, my muscles slept. I lost power to move; but, losing at the same time wish, it was no privation. That kind *bonne* placed a screen between me and the lamp; I saw her rise to do this, but do not remember seeing

her resume her place: in the interval between the two acts, I “fell on sleep.”

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At waking, lo! all was again changed. The light of high day surrounded me; not, indeed, a warm, summer light, but the leaden gloom of raw and blustering autumn. I felt sure now that I was in the pensionnat—sure by the beating rain on the casement; sure by the “wuther” of wind amongst trees, denoting a garden outside; sure by the chill, the whiteness, the solitude, amidst which I lay. I say *whiteness*—for the dimity curtains, dropped before a French bed, bounded my view.

I lifted them; I looked out. My eye, prepared to take in the range of a long, large, and white-washed chamber, blinked baffled, on encountering the limited area of a small cabinet—a cabinet with sea-green walls; also, instead of five wide and naked windows, there was one high lattice, shaded with muslin festoons: instead of two dozen little stands of painted wood, each holding a basin and an ewer, there was a toilette table dressed, like a lady for a ball, in a white robe over a pink skirt; a polished and large glass crowned, and a pretty pincushion frilled with



lace adorned it. This toilette, together with a small, low, green and white chintz arm-chair, a wash-stand topped with a marble slab, and supplied with utensils of pale-green ware, sufficiently furnished the tiny chamber.

Reader, I felt alarmed! Why? you will ask. What was there in this simple and somewhat pretty sleeping-closet to startle the most timid? Merely this—These articles of furniture could not be real, solid arm-chairs, looking-glasses, and wash-stands—they must be the ghosts of such articles; or, if this were denied as too wild an hypothesis—and, confounded as I was, I *did* deny it—there remained but to conclude that I had myself passed into an abnormal state of mind; in short, that I was very ill and delirious: and even then, mine was the strangest figment with which delirium had ever harassed a victim.

I knew—I was obliged to know—the green chintz of that little chair; the little snug chair itself, the carved, shining-black, foliated frame of that glass; the smooth, milky-green of the china vessels on the stand; the very stand too, with its top of gray marble, splintered at one corner;—all these I was compelled to recognize and to hail, as last night I had,

perforce, recognized and hailed the rosewood, the drapery, the porcelain, of the drawing-room.

Bretton! Bretton! and ten years ago shone reflected in that mirror. And why did Bretton and my fourteenth year haunt me thus? Why, if they came at all, did they not return complete? Why hovered before my distempered vision the mere furniture, while the rooms and the locality were gone? As to that pin-cushion made of crimson satin, ornamented with gold beads and frilled with thread-lace, I had the same right to know it as to know the screens—I had made it myself. Rising with a start from the bed, I took the cushion in my hand and examined it. There was the cipher “L. L. B.” formed in gold beads, and surrounded with an oval wreath embroidered in white silk. These were the initials of my godmother’s name—Louisa Lucy Bretton.

Am I in England? Am I at Bretton? I muttered; and hastily pulling up the blind with which the lattice was shrouded, I looked out to try and discover *where* I was; half-prepared to meet the calm, old, handsome buildings and clean gray pavement of St. Ann’s Street, and to see at the end, the towers of the minster: or, if otherwise, fully expectant of a town

view somewhere, a rue in Villette, if not a street in a pleasant and ancient English city.

I looked, on the contrary, through a frame of leafage, clustering round the high lattice, and forth thence to a grassy mead-like level, a lawn-terrace with trees rising from the lower ground beyond—high forest-trees, such as I had not seen for many a day. They were now groaning under the gale of October, and between their trunks I traced the line of an avenue, where yellow leaves lay in heaps and drifts, or were whirled singly before the sweeping west wind. Whatever landscape might lie further must have been flat, and these tall beeches shut it out. The place seemed secluded, and was to me quite strange: I did not know it at all.

Once more I lay down. My bed stood in a little alcove; on turning my face to the wall, the room with its bewildering accompaniments became excluded. Excluded? No! For as I arranged my position in this hope, behold, on the green space between the divided and looped-up curtains, hung a broad, gilded picture-frame enclosing a portrait. It was drawn—well drawn, though but a sketch—in water-colours; a head, a boy's head, fresh, life-like, speaking, and animated. It seemed a youth of

sixteen, fair-complexioned, with sanguine health in his cheek ; hair long, not dark, and with a sunny sheen ; penetrating eyes, an arch mouth, and a gay smile. On the whole a most pleasant face to look at, especially for those claiming a right to that youth's affection—parents, for instance, or sisters. Any romantic little school-girl might almost have loved it in its frame. Those eyes looked as if when somewhat older they would flash a lightning response to love : I cannot tell whether they kept in store the steady-beaming shine of faith. For whatever sentiment met him in form too facile, his lips menaced, beautifully but surely, caprice and light esteem.

Striving to take each new discovery as quietly as I could, I whispered to myself—

“ Ah ! that portrait used to hang in the breakfast-room, over the mantel-piece : somewhat too high, as I thought. I well remember how I used to mount a music-stool for the purpose of unhooking it, holding it in my hand, and searching into those bonny wells of eyes, whose glance under their hazel lashes seemed like a pencilled laugh ; and well I liked to note the colouring of the cheek, and the expression of the mouth.” I hardly believed fancy could im-

prove on the curve of that mouth, or of the chin; even *my* ignorance knew that both were beautiful, and pondered, perplexed over this doubt: "How it was that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain?" Once, by way of test, I took little Missy Home, and, lifting her in my arms, told her to look at the picture.

"Do you like it, Polly?" I asked. She never answered, but gazed long, and at last a darkness went trembling through her sensitive eye, as she said, "Put me down." So I put her down, saying to myself: "The child feels it too."

All these things did I now think over, adding, "He had his faults, yet scarce ever was a finer nature; liberal, suave, impressible." My reflections closed in an audibly pronounced word, "Graham!"

"Graham!" echoed a sudden voice at the bedside.

"Do you want Graham?"

I looked. The plot was but thickening; the wonder but culminating. If it was strange to see that well-remembered pictured form on the wall, still stranger was it to turn and behold the equally well-remembered living form opposite—a woman, a lady, most real and substantial, tall, well-attired,

wearing widow's silk, and such a cap as best became her matron and motherly braids of hair. Hers, too, was a good face; too marked, perhaps, now for beauty, but not for sense or character. She was little changed; something sterner, something more robust—but she was my godmother: still the distinct vision of Mrs. Bretton.

I kept quiet, yet internally I was much agitated: my pulse fluttered, and the blood left my cheek, which turned cold.

“Madam, where am I?” I inquired.

“In a very safe asylum; well protected for the present: make your mind quite easy till you get a little better; you look ill this morning.”

“I am so entirely bewildered, I do not know whether I can trust my senses at all, or whether they are misleading me in every particular: but you speak English, do you not, madam?”

“I should think you might hear that: it would puzzle me to hold a long discourse in French.”

“You do not come from England?”

“I am lately arrived thence. Have you been long in this country? You seem to know my son?”

“Do I, madam? Perhaps I do. Your son—the picture there?”

"That is his portrait as a youth. While looking at it, you pronounced his name."

"Graham Bretton?"

She nodded.

"I speak to Mrs. Bretton, formerly of Bretton, —shire?"

"Quite right; and you, I am told, are an English teacher in a foreign school here: my son recognized you as such."

"How was I found, madam, and by whom?"

"My son shall tell you that by-and-by," said she; "but at present you are too confused and weak for conversation: try to eat some breakfast, and then sleep."

Notwithstanding all I had undergone—the bodily fatigue, the perturbation of spirits, the exposure to weather—it seemed that I was better: the fever, the real malady which had oppressed my frame, was abating; for, whereas during the last nine days I had taken no solid food, and suffered from continual thirst, this morning, on breakfast being offered, I experienced a craving for nourishment: an inward faintness which caused me eagerly to taste the tea this lady offered, and to eat the morsel of dry toast she allowed in accompaniment. It was only a

morsel, but it sufficed ; keeping up my strength till some two or three hours afterwards, when the *bonne* brought me a little cup of broth and a biscuit.

As evening began to darken, and the ceaseless blast still blew wild and cold, and the rain streamed on, deluge-like, I grew weary—very weary of my bed. The room, though pretty, was small: I felt it confining; I longed for a change. The increasing chill and gathering gloom, too, depressed me; I wanted to see—to feel firelight. Besides, I kept thinking of the son of that tall matron: when should I see him? Certainly not till I left my room.

At last the *bonne* came to make my bed for the night. She prepared to wrap me in a blanket and place me in the little chintz chair; but, declining these attentions, I proceeded to dress myself. The business was just achieved, and I was sitting down to take breath, when Mrs. Bretton once more appeared.

“Dressed!” she exclaimed, smiling with that smile I so well knew—a pleasant smile, though not soft;—“You are quite better then? Quite strong—eh?”

She spoke to me so much as of old she used to speak that I almost fancied she was beginning to know me. There was the same sort of patronage



in her voice and manner that, as a girl, I had always experienced from her—a patronage I yielded to and even liked; it was not founded on conventional grounds of superior wealth or station (in the last particular there had never been any inequality; her degree was mine) but on natural reasons of physical advantage: it was the shelter the tree gives the herb. I put a request without further ceremony.

“Do let me go down stairs, madam; I am so cold and dull here.”

“I desire nothing better, if you are strong enough to bear the change,” was her reply. “Come then; here is an arm.” And she offered me hers: I took it, and we descended one flight of carpeted steps to a landing where a tall door, standing open, gave admission into the blue damask room. How pleasant it was in its air of perfect domestic comfort! How warm in its amber lamp-light and vermilion fire-flush! To render the picture perfect, tea stood ready on the table—an English tea, whereof the whole shining service glanced at me familiarly; from the solid silver urn, of antique pattern, and the massive pot of the same metal, to the thin porcelain cups, dark with purple and gilding. I knew the very seed-cake of peculiar form, baked in a peculiar

mould, which always had a place on the tea-table at Bretton. Graham liked it, and there it was as of yore—set before Graham's plate with the silver knife and fork beside it. Graham was then expected to tea: Graham was now, perhaps, in the house; ere many minutes I might see him,

“Sit down—sit down,” said my conductress, as my step faltered a little in passing to the hearth. She seated me on the sofa, but I soon passed behind it, saying the fire was too hot; in its shade I found another seat which suited me better. Mrs. Bretton was never wont to make a fuss about any person or anything; without remonstrance she suffered me to have my own way. She made the tea, and she took up the newspaper. I liked to watch every action of my godmother; all her movements were so young: she must have been now above fifty, yet neither her sinews nor her spirit seemed yet touched by the rust of age. Though portly, she was alert, and though serene, she was at times impetuous—good health and an excellent temperament kept her green as in her spring.

While she read, I perceived she listened—listened for her son. She was not the woman ever to confess herself uneasy, but there was yet no lull

in the weather, and if Graham were out in that hoarse wind—roaring still unsatisfied—I well knew his mother's heart would be out with him.

“Ten minutes behind his time,” said she, looking at her watch; then, in another minute, a lifting of her eyes from the page, and a slight inclination of her head towards the door, denoted that she heard some sound. Presently her brow cleared; and then even my ear, less practised, caught the iron clash of a gate swung to, steps on gravel, lastly the door-bell. He was come. His mother filled the tea-pot from the urn, she drew nearer the hearth the stuffed and cushioned blue chair—her own chair by right, but I saw there was one who might with impunity usurp it. And when that *one* came up the stairs—which he soon did, after, I suppose, some such attention to the toilet as the wild and wet night rendered necessary, and strode straight in—

“Is it you, Graham?” said his mother, hiding a glad smile and speaking curtly.

“Who else should it be, mama?” demanded the Unpunctual, possessing himself irreverently of the abdicated throne.

“Don't you deserve cold tea, for being late?”

"I shall not get my deserts, for the urn sings cheerily."

"Wheel yourself to table, lazy boy : no-seat will serve you but mine ; if you had one spark of a sense of propriety, you would always leave that chair for the Old Lady."

"So I should ; only the dear Old Lady persists in leaving it for me. How is your patient, mama?"

"Will she come forward and speak for herself?" said Mrs. Bretton, turning to my corner ; and at this invitation, forward I came. Graham courteously rose up to greet me. He stood tall on the hearth, a figure justifying his mother's unconcealed pride.

"So you are come down," said he ; "you must be better then—much better. I scarcely expected we should meet thus, or here. I was alarmed last night, and if I had not been forced to hurry away to a dying patient, I certainly would not have left you ; but my mother herself is something of a doctress, and Martha an excellent nurse. I saw the case was a fainting-fit, not necessarily dangerous. What brought it on, I have yet to learn, and all particulars ; meantime, I trust you really do feel better."

"Much better," I said calmly. "Much better, I thank you, Dr. John."

For, reader, this tall young man—this darling son—this host of mine—this Graham Bretton, *was* Dr. John: he, and no other; and, what is more, I ascertained this identity scarcely with surprise. What is more, when I heard Graham's step on the stairs, I knew what manner of figure would enter, and for whose aspect to prepare my eyes. The discovery was not of to-day, its dawn had penetrated my perceptions long since. Of course I remembered young Bretton well; and though ten years (from sixteen to twenty-six) may greatly change the boy as they mature him to the man, yet they could bring no such utter difference as would suffice wholly to blind my eyes, or baffle my memory. Dr. John Graham Bretton retained still an affinity to the youth of sixteen: he had his eyes; he had some of his features; to wit, all the excellently-moulded lower half of the face; I found him out soon. I first recognized him on that occasion, noted several chapters back, when my unguardedly-fixed attention had drawn on me the mortification of an implied rebuke. Subsequent observation confirmed, in every point, that early surmise. I traced in the gesture, the port, and the habits of his manhood, all his boy's promise. I heard in his now deep tones the accent

of former days. Certain turns of phrase, peculiar to him of old, were peculiar to him still; and so was many a trick of eye and lip, many a smile, many a sudden ray levelled from the irid, under his well-charactered brow.

To *say* anything on the subject, to *hint* at my discovery, had not suited my habits of thought, or assimilated with my system of feeling. On the contrary, I had preferred to keep the matter to myself. I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination, which shone all partial over his head, trembled about his feet, and cast light no farther.

Well I knew that to him it could make little difference, were I to come forward and announce "This is Lucy Snowe!" So I kept back in my teacher's place; and as he never asked my name, so I never gave it. He heard me called "Miss," and "Miss Lucy;" he never heard the surname, "Snowe." As to spontaneous recognition—though I, perhaps, was still less changed than he—the idea never approached his mind, and why should I suggest it?

During tea, Dr. John was kind, as it was his nature to be; that meal over, and the tray carried out,

he made a cosy arrangement of the cushions in a corner of the sofa, and obliged me to settle amongst them. He and his mother also drew to the fire, and ere we had sat ten minutes, I caught the eye of the latter fastened steadily upon me. Women are certainly quicker in some things than men.

“Well,” she exclaimed, presently; “I have seldom seen a stronger likeness! Graham, have you observed it?”

“Observed what? What ails the Old Lady now? How you stare, mama! One would think you had an attack of second-sight.”

“Tell me, Graham, of whom does that young lady remind you?” pointing to me.

“Mama, you put her out of countenance. I often tell you abruptness is your fault; remember, too, that to you she is a stranger, and does not know your ways.”

“Now, when she looks down; now, when she turns sideways, who is she like, Graham?”

“Indeed, mama, since you propound the riddle, I think you ought to solve it!”

“And you have known her some time, you say—ever since you first began to attend the school in the

Rue Fossette;—yet you never mentioned to me that singular resemblance!”

“I could not mention a thing of which I never thought, and which I do not now acknowledge. What *can* you mean?”

“Stupid boy! look at her.”

Graham did look: but this was not to be endured; I saw how it must end, so I thought it best to anticipate.

“Dr. John,” I said, “has had so much to do and think of, since he and I shook hands at our last parting in St. Ann’s Street, that, while I readily found out Mr. Graham Bretton, some months ago, it never occurred to me as possible that he should recognize Lucy Snowe.”

“Lucy Snowe! I thought so! I knew it!” cried Mrs. Bretton. And she at once stepped across the hearth and kissed me. Some ladies would, perhaps, have made a great bustle upon such a discovery without being particularly glad of it; but it was not my godmother’s habit to make a bustle, and she preferred all sentimental demonstration in bas-relief. So she and I got over the surprise with few words and a single salute; yet I daresay she was pleased, and I know I was. While we renewed old acquaint-



tance, Graham, sitting opposite, silently disposed of his paroxysm of astonishment.

“Mama calls me a stupid boy, and I think I am so;” at length he said, “for, upon my honour, often as I have seen you, I never once suspected this fact: and yet I perceive it all now. Lucy Snowe! To be sure! I recollect her perfectly, and there she sits; not a doubt of it. But,” he added, “you surely have not known me as an old acquaintance all this time, and never mentioned it?”

“That I have,” was my answer.

Dr. John commented not. I supposed he regarded my silence as eccentric, but he was indulgent in refraining from censure. I dare say, too, he would have deemed it impertinent to have interrogated me very closely, to have asked me the why and wherefore of my reserve; and, though he might feel a little curious, the importance of the case was by no means such as to tempt curiosity to infringe on discretion.

For my part, I just ventured to inquire whether he remembered the circumstance of my once looking at him very fixedly; for the slight annoyance he had betrayed on that occasion, still lingered sore on my mind.

"I think I do!" said he: "I think I was even cross with you."

"You considered me a little bold, perhaps?" I inquired.

"Not at all. Only, shy and retiring as your general manner was, I wondered what personal or facial enormity in me proved so magnetic to your usually averted eyes."

"You see how it was, now?"

"Perfectly."

And here Mrs. Bretton broke in with many, many questions about past times; and for her satisfaction I had to recur to gone-by troubles, to explain causes of seeming estrangement, to touch on single-handed conflict with Life, with Death, with Grief, with Fate. Dr. John listened, saying little. He and she then told me of changes they had known: even with them, all had not gone smoothly, and fortune had retrenched her once abundant gifts. But so courageous a mother, with such a champion in her son, was well fitted to fight a good fight with the world, and to prevail ultimately. Dr. John himself was one of those on whose birth benign planets have certainly smiled. Adversity might set against him her most sullen front: he was the man to beat her down with smiles.

Strong and cheerful, and firm and courteous ; not rash, yet valiant; he was the aspirant to woo Destiny herself, and to win from her stone eye-balls a beam almost loving.

In the profession he had adopted, his success was now quite decided. Within the last three months, he had taken this house (a small chateau, they told me, about half a league without the Porte de Crécy) ; this country site being chosen for the sake of his mother's health, with which town air did not now agree. Hither he had invited Mrs. Bretton, and she, on leaving England, had brought with her such residue furniture of the former St. Ann's Street mansion, as she had thought fit to keep unsold. Hence my bewilderment at the phantoms of chairs, and the wraiths of looking glasses, tea urns, and tea cups.

As the clock struck eleven, Dr. John stopped his mother.

"Miss Snowe must retire now," he said ; " she is beginning to look very pale. To-morrow I will venture to put some questions respecting the cause of her loss of health. She is much changed indeed, since last July, when I saw her enact with no little spirit, the part of a very killing fine gentleman. As to last night's catastrophe, I am sure thereby

hangs a tale, but we will inquire no further this evening. Good night, Miss Lucy."

And so, he kindly led me to the door, and holding a wax candle, lighted me up the one flight of steps.

When I had said my prayers, and when I was undressed and laid down, I felt that I still had friends. Friends, not professing vehement attachment, not offering the tender solace of well-matched and congenial relationship; on whom, therefore, but moderate demand of affection was to be made, of whom but moderate expectation formed; but towards whom, my heart softened instinctively and yearned with an importunate gratitude, which I entreated Reason betimes to check.

"Do not let me think of them too often, too much, too fondly," I implored; "let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream: let me not run athirst, and apply passionately to its welcome waters: let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth's fountains know. Oh! would to God! I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil!"

Still repeating this word, I turned to my pillow; and, *still* repeating it, I steeped that pillow with tears.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## LA TERRASSE.

THESE struggles with the natural character, the strong native bent of the heart, may seem futile and fruitless, but in the end they do good. They tend, however slightly, to give the actions, the conduct, that turn which Reason approves, and which Feeling, perhaps, too often opposes: they certainly make a difference in the general tenor of a life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall. As to what lies below, leave that with God. Man, your equal, weak as you, and not fit to be your judge, may be shut out thence: take it to your Maker—show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave—ask Him how you are to bear the pains He has appointed—kneel in His presence, and pray with faith for light in darkness,

for strength in piteous weakness, for patience in extreme need. Certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not *your* hour, the waiting waters will stir; in *some* shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled, the healing herald will descend. The cripple and the blind, and the dumb, and the possessed, will be led to bathe. Herald, come quickly! Thousands lie round the pool, weeping and despairing, to see it, through slow years, stagnant. Long are the "times" of Heaven: the orbits of angel messengers seem wide to mortal vision; they may en-ring ages: the cycle of one departure and return may clasp unnumbered generations; and dust, kindling to brief suffering life, and, through pain, passing back to dust, may meanwhile perish out of memory again, and yet again. To how many maimed and mourning millions is the first and sole angel visitant, him easterns call Azrael.

I tried to get up next morning, but while I was dressing, and at intervals drinking cold water from the *carafe* on my washstand, with design to brace up that trembling weakness which made dressing so difficult, in came Mrs. Bretton.

"Here is an absurdity!" was her morning accost.

“Not so,” she added, and dealing with me at once in her own brusque, energetic fashion—that fashion which I used formerly to enjoy seeing applied to her son, and by him vigorously resisted—in two minutes she consigned me captive to the French bed.

“There you lie till afternoon,” said she. “My boy left orders before he went out that such should be the case, and I can assure you my son is master and must be obeyed. Presently you shall have breakfast.”

Presently she brought that meal—brought it with her own active hands—not leaving me to servants. She seated herself on the bed while I ate. Now it is not everybody, even amongst our respected friends and esteemed acquaintance, whom we like to have near us, whom we like to watch us, to wait on us, to approach us with the proximity of a nurse to a patient. It is not every friend whose eye is a light in a sick room, whose presence is there a solace: but all this was Mrs. Bretton to me; all this she had ever been. Food or drink never pleased me so well as when it came through her hands. I do not remember the occasion when her entrance into a room had not made that room

cheerier. Our natures own predilections and antipathies alike strange. There are people from whom we secretly shrink, whom we would personally avoid, though reason confesses that they are good people : there are others with faults of temper, &c., evident enough, beside whom we live content, as if the air about them did us good. My godmother's lively black eye and clear brunette cheek, her warm, prompt hand, her self-reliant mood, her decided bearing, were all beneficial to me as the atmosphere of some salubrious climate. Her son used to call her "the old lady;" it filled me with pleasant wonder to note how the alacrity and power of five-and-twenty still breathed from her and around her.

"I would bring my work here," she said, as she took from me the emptied tea-cup, "and sit with you the whole day, if that overbearing John Graham had not put his veto upon such a proceeding. 'Now, mama,' he said, when he went out, 'take notice, you are not to knock up your god-daughter with gossip,' and he particularly desired me to keep close to my own quarters, and spare you my fine company. He says, Lucy, he thinks you have had a nervous fever, judging from your look,—is that so?"



I replied that I did not quite know what my ailment had been, but that I had certainly suffered a good deal, especially in mind. Further, on this subject, I did not consider it advisable to dwell, for the details of what I had undergone belonged to a portion of my existence in which I never expected my godmother to take a share. Into what a new region would such a confidence have led that hale, serene nature! The difference between her and me might be figured by that between the stately ship, cruising safe on smooth seas, with its full complement of crew, a captain gay and brave, and venturesome and provident; and the life-boat, which most days of the year lies dry and solitary in an old, dark boat-house, only putting to sea when the billows run high in rough weather, when cloud encounters water, when danger and death divide between them the rule of the great deep. No, the "Louisa Bretton" never was out of harbour on such a night, and in such a scene: her crew could not conceive it; so the half-drowned life-boat man keeps his own counsel, and spins no yarns.

She left me, and I lay in bed content: it was good of Graham to remember me before he went out.

My day was lonely, but the prospect of coming

evening abridged and cheered it. Then, too, I felt weak, and rest seemed welcome; and after the morning hours were gone by—those hours which always bring, even to the necessarily unoccupied, a sense of business to be done, of tasks waiting fulfilment, a vague impression of obligation to be employed—when this stirring time was past, and the silent descent of afternoon hushed housemaid steps on the stairs and in the chambers, I then passed into a dreamy mood, not unpleasant.

My calm little room seemed somehow like a cave in the sea. There was no colour about it, except that white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water; the blanché cornice was adorned with shell-shaped ornaments, and there were white mouldings like dolphins in the ceiling-angles. Even that one touch of colour visible in the red satin pincushion bore affinity to coral; even that dark, shining glass might have mirrored a mermaid. When I closed my eyes, I heard a gale, subsiding at last, bearing upon the house-front like a settling swell upon a rock-base. I heard it drawn and withdrawn far, far off, like a tide retiring from a shore of the upper world—a world so high above that the rush of its largest waves, the dash of its fiercest breakers could

sound down in this submarine home, only like murmurs and a lullaby.

Amidst these dreams came evening, and then Martha brought a light; with her aid I was quickly dressed, and, stronger now than in the morning, I made my way down to the blue saloon unassisted.

Dr. John, it appears, had concluded his round of professional calls earlier than usual; his form was the first object that met my eyes as I entered the parlour; he stood in that window-recess opposite the door, reading the close type of a newspaper by such dull light as closing day yet gave. The fire shone clear, but the lamp stood on the table unlit, and tea was not yet brought up.

As to Mrs. Bretton, my active godmother—who, I afterwards found, had been out in the open air all day—lay half-reclined in her deep-cushioned chair, actually lost in a nap. Her son seeing me, came forward. I noticed that he trod carefully, not to wake the sleeper; he also spoke low: his mellow voice never had any sharpness in it; modulated as at present, it was calculated rather to soothe than startle slumber.

“This is a quiet little chateau,” he observed, after inviting me to sit near the casement, “I don’t know

whether you may have noticed it in your walks : though, indeed, from the chaussée it is not visible ; just a mile beyond the Porte de Crécy, you turn down a lane which soon becomes an avenue, and that leads you on, through meadow and shade, to the very door of this house. It is not a modern place, but built somewhat in the old style of the Basse-Ville. It is rather a manoir than a chateau ; they call it ‘ La Terrasse,’ because its front rises from a broad turfed walk, whence steps lead down a grassy slope to the avenue. See yonder ! The moon rises : she looks well through the tree boles.”

Where, indeed, does the moon not look well ? What is the scene, confined or expansive, which her orb does not hallow ? Rosy or fiery, she mounted now above a not distant bank ; even while we watched her flushed ascent, she cleared to gold, and in very brief space, floated up stainless into a now calm sky. Did moonlight soften or sadden Dr. Bretton ? Did it touch him with romance ? I think it did. Albeit of no sighing mood, he sighed in watching it : sighed to himself quietly. No need to ponder the cause or the course of that sigh ; I knew it was wakened by beauty : I knew it pursued Ginevra. Knowing this, the idea pressed upon me

that it was in some sort my duty to speak the name he meditated. Of course he was ready for the subject: I saw in his countenance a teeming plenitude of comment, question and interest; a pressure of language and sentiment, only checked, I thought, by sense of embarrassment how to begin. To spare him this embarrassment was my best, indeed my sole use. I had but to utter the idol's name, and love's tender litany would flow out. I had just found a fitting phrase: "You know that Miss Fanshawe is gone on a tour with the Cholmondeleys," and was opening my lips to speak it, when he scattered my plans by introducing another theme.

"The first thing this morning," said he, putting his sentiment in his pocket, turning from the moon, and sitting down, "I went to the Rue Fossette, and told the cuisinière that you were safe and in good hands. Do you know I actually found that she had not yet discovered your absence from the house: she thought you safe in the great dormitory. With what care must you have been waited on!"

"Oh! all that is very conceivable," said I. "Goton could do nothing for me but bring me a little tisane and a crust of bread, and I had rejected both so often during the past week, that the good

woman got tired of useless journeys from the dwelling-house kitchen to the school-dormitory, and only came once a day at noon, to make my bed. Believe, however, that she is a good natured creature, and would have been delighted to cook me cotelettes de mouton, if I could have eaten them."

"What did Madam Beck mean by leaving you alone?"

"Madam Beck could not foresee that I should fall ill."

"Your nervous system bore a good share of the suffering?"

"I am not quite sure what my nervous system is, but I was dreadfully low-spirited."

"Which disables me from helping you by pill or potion. Medicine can give nobody good spirits. My art halts at threshold of Hypochondria: she just looks in and sees a chamber of torture, but can neither say nor do much. Cheerful society would be of use; you should be as little alone as possible; you should take plenty of exercise."

Acquiescence and a pause followed these remarks. They sounded all right, I thought, and bore the safe sanction of custom, and the well worn stamp of use.

“Miss Snowe,” recommenced Dr. John—my health, nervous system included, being now somewhat to my relief, discussed and done with—“is it permitted me to ask what your religion now is? Are you a Catholic?”

I looked up in some surprise—“A Catholic? No! Why suggest such an idea?”

“The manner in which you were consigned to me last night, made me doubt.”

“I consigned to you? But, indeed, I forget. It remains yet for me to learn how I fell into your hands.”

“Why, under circumstances that puzzled me. I had been in attendance all day yesterday on a case of singularly interesting, and critical character; the disease being rare, and its treatment doubtful: I saw a similar and still finer case in a hospital at Paris; but that will not interest you. At last a mitigation of the patient’s most urgent symptoms (acute pain is one of its accompaniments) liberated me, and I set out homeward. My shortest way lay through the Basse-Ville, and as the night was excessively dark, wild and wet, I took it. In riding past an old church belonging to a community of Bèguines, I saw by a lamp burning over the porch

or deep arch of the entrance, a priest lifting some object in his arms. The lamp was bright enough to reveal the priest's features clearly, and I recognized him; he was a man I have often met by the sick beds of both rich and poor: and, chiefly, the latter. He is, I think, a good old man, far better than most of his class in this country; superior, indeed, in every way: better informed, as well as more devoted to duty. Our eyes met, he called on me to stop; what he supported was a woman, fainting or dying. I alighted.

“ ‘This person is one of your countrywomen,’ he said: ‘save her, if she is not dead.’

“My countrywoman, on examination, turned out to be the English teacher at Madam Beck's pensionnat. She was perfectly unconscious, perfectly bloodless, and nearly cold.

“ ‘What does it all mean?’ was my inquiry.

“He communicated a curious account: that you had been to him that evening at confessional; that your exhausted and suffering appearance, coupled with some things you had said—”

“Things I had said? I wonder what things!”

“Awful crimes, no doubt; but he did not tell me what: there, you know, the seal of the confessional



checked his garrulity and my curiosity. Your confidences, however, had not made an enemy of the good father; it seems he was so struck, and felt so sorry that you should be out on such a night alone, he had esteemed it a christian duty to watch when you quitted the church, and so to manage as not to lose sight of you, till you should have reached home. Perhaps the worthy man might, half unconsciously, have blent in this proceeding, some little of the subtlety of his class: it might have been his resolve to learn the locality of your home—did you impart that in your confession?”

“I did not: on the contrary, I carefully avoided the shadow of any indication; and as to my confession, Dr. John, I suppose you will think me mad for taking such a step, but I could not help it: I suppose it was all the fault of what you call my ‘nervous system.’ I cannot put the case into words, but, my days and nights were grown intolerable; a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind: a feeling that would make its way, rush out, or kill me—like (and this you will understand, Dr. John) the current which passes through the heart, and which, if aneurism or any other morbid cause obstructs its natural channels,

seeks abnormal outlet. I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel. I could find none of these in closet, or chamber, so I went and sought them in church and confessional. As to what I said, it was no confidence, no narrative. I have done nothing wrong: my life has not been active enough for any dark deed, either of romance or reality: all I poured out was a dreary, desperate complaint."

"Lucy, you ought to travel for about six months: why, your calm nature is growing quite excitable! Confound Madame Beck! Has the little buxom widow no bowels, to condemn her best teacher to solitary confinement?"

"It was not Madame Beck's fault," said I; "it is no living being's fault, and I won't hear any one blamed."

"Who is in the wrong then, Lucy?"

"Me—Dr. John—me; and a great abstraction on whose wide shoulders I like to lay the mountains of blame they were sculptured to bear: me and Fate."

"'Me' must take better care in future," said Dr. John—smiling, I suppose, at my bad grammar.

"Change of air—change of scene; those are my prescriptions," pursued the practical young doctor.

“But to return to our muttons, Lucy. As yet, Père Silas, with all his tact (they say he is a Jesuit), is no wiser than you choose him to be; for, instead of returning to the Rue Fossette, your fevered wanderings—there must have been high fever——”

“No, Dr. John: the fever took its turn that night—now, don’t make out that I was delirious, for I know differently.”

“Good! you were as collected as myself at this moment, no doubt! Your wanderings had taken an opposite direction to the Pensionnat. Near the Béguinage, amidst the stress of flood and gust, and in the perplexity of darkness, you had swooned and fallen. The priest came to your succour, and the physician, as we have seen, supervened. Between us we procured a fiacre and brought you here. Père Silas, old as he is, would carry you up stairs, and lay you on that couch himself. He would certainly have remained with you till suspended animation had been restored; and so should I, but, at that juncture, a hurried messenger arrived from the dying patient I had scarcely left—the last duties were called for—the physician’s last visit and the priest’s last rite; extreme unction could not be deferred. Père Silas and myself departed together,

my mother was spending the evening abroad ; we gave you in charge to Martha, leaving directions, which it seems she followed successfully. Now, are you a Catholic ?”

“ Not yet,” said I, with a smile. “ And never let Père Silas know where I live, or he will try to convert me ; but give him my best and truest thanks when you see him, and if ever I get rich I will send him money for his charities. See, Dr. John, your mother wakes ; you ought to ring for tea.”

Which he did ; and, as Mrs. Bretton sat up—astonished and indignant at herself for the indulgence to which she had succumbed, and fully prepared to deny that she had slept at all—her son came gaily to the attack :

“ Hushaby, mama ! Sleep again. You look the picture of innocence in your slumbers.”

“ My slumbers, John Graham ! What are you talking about ? You know I never *do* sleep by day : it was the slightest doze possible.”

“ Exactly ! a seraph’s gentle lapse—a fairy’s dream. Mama, under such circumstances, you always remind me of Titania.”

“ That is because you, yourself, are so like Bottom.”

“Miss Snowe—did you ever hear anything like mama’s wit? She is a most sprightly woman of her size and age.”

“Keep your compliments to yourself, sir, and do not neglect your own size: which seems to me a good deal on the increase. Lucy, has he not rather the air of an incipient John Bull? He used to be slender as an eel, and now I fancy in him a sort of heavy-dragoon bent—a beef-eater tendency. Graham, take notice! If you grow fat I disown you.”

“As if you could not sooner disown your own personality! I am indispensable to the old lady’s happiness, Lucy. She would pine away in green and yellow melancholy if she had not my six feet of iniquity to scold. It keeps her lively—it maintains the wholesome ferment of her spirits.”

The two were now standing opposite to each other, one on each side the fire-place; their words were not very fond, but their mutual looks atoned for verbal deficiencies. At least, the best treasure of Mrs. Bretton’s life was certainly casketed in her son’s bosom; her dearest pulse throbbed in his heart. As to him, of course another love shared his feelings with filial love; and, no doubt, as the new

passion was the latest born, so he assigned it in his emotions Benjamin's portion. Ginevra ! Ginevra ! Did Mrs. Bretton yet know at whose feet her own young idol had laid his homage ? Would she approve that choice ? I could not tell ; but I could well guess that if she knew Miss Fanshawe's conduct towards Graham : her alternations between coldness and coaxing, and repulse and allurements ; if she could at all suspect the pain with which she had tried him ; if she could have seen, as I had seen, his fine spirits subdued and harassed, his inferior preferred before him, his subordinate made the instrument of his humiliation—*then* Mrs. Bretton would have pronounced Ginevra imbecile, or perverted, or both. Well—I thought so too.

That second evening passed as sweetly as the first—*more* sweetly indeed : we enjoyed a smoother interchange of thought ; old troubles were not reverted to, acquaintance was better cemented ; I felt happier, easier, more at home. That night—instead of crying myself asleep—I went down to dreamland by a pathway bordered with pleasant thoughts.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## WE QUARREL.

DURING the first days of my stay at the Terrace, Graham never took a seat near me, or in his frequent pacing of the room approached the quarter where I sat, or looked preoccupied, or more grave than usual, but I thought of Miss Fanshawe and expected her name to leap from his lips. I kept my ear and mind in perpetual readiness for the tender theme; my patience was ordered to be permanently under arms, and my sympathy desired to keep its cornucopia replenished and ready for outpouring. At last, and after a little inward struggle which I saw and respected, he one day launched into the topic. It was introduced delicately; anonymously as it were.

“Your friend is spending her vacation in travel-

ling, I hear?" "Friend, forsooth!" thought I to myself: but it would not do to contradict; he must have his own way; I must own the soft impeachment: friend let it be. Still, by way of experiment, I could not help asking whom he meant?

He had taken a seat at my work-table; he now laid hands on a reel of thread which he proceeded recklessly to unwind.

"Ginevra—Miss Fanshawe, has accompanied the Cholmondeleys on a tour through the south of France?"

"She has."

"Do you and she correspond?"

"It will astonish you to hear that I never once thought of making application for that privilege."

"You have seen letters of her writing?"

"Yes; several to her uncle."

"They will not be deficient in wit and *naïveté*; there is so much sparkle, and so little art in her soul?"

"She writes comprehensibly enough when she writes to M. de Bassompierre: he who runs may read." (In fact, Ginevra's epistles to her wealthy kinsman were commonly business documents, unequivocal applications for cash.)



“And her handwriting? It must be pretty, light, ladylike, I should think?”

It was, and I said so.

“I verily believe that all she does is well done,” said Dr. John; and as I seemed in no hurry to chime in with this remark, he added: “You, who know her, could you name a point in which she is deficient?”

“She does several things very well.” (“Flirtation amongst the rest,” subjoined I, in thought.)

“When do you suppose she will return to town?” he soon inquired.

“Pardon me, Dr. John, I must explain. You honour me too much in ascribing to me a degree of intimacy with Miss Fanshawe I have not the felicity to enjoy. I have never been the depositary of her plans and secrets. You will find her particular friends in another sphere than mine: amongst the Cholmondeleys, for instance.”

He actually thought I was stung with a kind of jealous pain similar to his own! “Excuse her;” he said, “judge her indulgently; the glitter of fashion misleads her, but she will soon find out that these people are hollow, and will return to you with augmented attachment and confirmed trust. I

know something of the Cholmondeleys ; superficial, showy, selfish people : depend on it, at heart Ginevra values you beyond a score of such."

"You are very kind." I said briefly. A disclaimer of the sentiments attributed to me burned on my lips, but I extinguished the flame. I submitted to be looked upon as the humiliated, cast-off, and now pining confidante of the distinguished Miss Fanshawe : but, reader, it was a hard submission.

"Yet, you see," continued Graham, "while I comfort *you*, I cannot take the same consolation to myself; I cannot hope she will do me justice. De Hamal is most worthless, yet I fear he pleases her : wretched delusion !"

My patience really gave way, and without notice : all at once. I suppose illness and weakness had worn it and made it brittle.

"Dr. Bretton," I broke out, "there is no delusion like your own. On all points but one you are a man, frank, healthful, right-thinking, clear-sighted : on this exceptional point you are but a slave. I declare, where Miss Fanshawe is concerned, you merit no respect ; nor have you mine."

I got up, and left the room very much excited.

This little scene took place in the morning ;

I had to meet him again in the evening, and then I saw I had done mischief. He was not made of common clay, not put together out of vulgar materials ; while the outlines of his nature had been shaped with breadth and vigour, the details embraced workmanship of almost feminine delicacy : finer, much finer, than you could be prepared to meet with ; than you could believe inherent in him, even after years of acquaintance. Indeed, till some over-sharp contact with his nerves had betrayed, by its effects, their acute sensibility, this elaborate construction must be ignored ; and the more especially because the sympathetic faculty was not prominent in him : to feel, and to seize quickly another's feelings, are separate properties ; a few constructions possess both, some neither. Dr. John had the one gift in exquisite perfection ; and because I have admitted that he was not endowed with the other in equal degree, the reader will considerably refrain from passing to an extreme, and pronouncing him *unsympathizing*, *unfeeling* : on the contrary, he was a kind, generous man. Make your need known, his hand was open. Put your grief into words, he turned no deaf ear. Expect refinements of perception, miracles of intuition, and realize disappoint-

ment. This night, when Dr. John entered the room, and met the evening lamp, I saw well and at one glance his whole mechanism.

To one who had named him "slave," and, on any point, banned him from respect, he must now have peculiar feelings. That the epithet was well applied, and the ban just, might be; he put forth no denial that it was so: his mind even candidly revolved that unmanning possibility. He sought in this accusation the cause of that ill-success which had got so galling a hold on his mental peace. Amid the worry of a self-condemnatory soliloquy, his demeanour seemed grave, perhaps cold, both to me and his mother. And yet there was no bad feeling, no malice, no rancour, no littleness in his countenance, beautiful with a man's best beauty, even in its depression. When I placed his chair at the table, which I hastened to do, anticipating the servant, and when I handed him his tea, which I did with trembling care, he said—

"Thank you, Lucy," in as kindly a tone of his full pleasant voice as ever my ear welcomed.

For my part, there was only one plan to be pursued; I must expiate my culpable vehemence, or I must not sleep that night. This would not do at

all; I could not stand it: I made no pretence of capacity to wage war on this footing. School solitude, conventual silence and stagnation, anything seemed preferable to living embroiled with Dr. John. As to Ginevra, she might take the silver wings of a dove, or any other fowl that flies, and mount straight up to the highest place, among the highest stars, where her lover's highest flight of fancy chose to fix the constellation of her charms: never more be it mine to dispute the arrangement. Long I tried to catch his eye. Again and again that eye just met mine; but, having nothing to say, it withdrew, and I was baffled. After tea, he sat, sad and quiet, reading a book. I wished I could have dared to go and sit near him, but it seemed that if I ventured to take that step, he would infallibly evince hostility and indignation. I longed to speak out, and I dared not whisper. His mother left the room; then, moved by insupportable regret, I just murmured the words "Dr. Bretton."

He looked up from his book; his eyes were not cold or malevolent, his mouth was not cynical; he was ready and willing to hear what I might have to say: his spirit was of vintage too mellow and generous to sour in one thunder-clap.

“Dr. Bretton, forgive my hasty words : *do*, *do* forgive them.”

He smiled that moment I spoke. “Perhaps I deserved them, Lucy. If you don’t respect me, I am sure it is because I am not respectable. I fear, I am an awkward fool : I must manage badly in some way, for where I wish to please, it seems I don’t please.”

“Of that you cannot be sure ; and even if such be the case, is it the fault of your character, or of another’s perceptions ? But now, let me unsay what I said in anger. In one thing, and in all things, I deeply respect you. If you think scarcely enough of yourself, and too much of others, what is that but an excellence ?”

“Can I think too much of Ginevra ?”

“*I* believe you may ; *you* believe you can’t. Let us agree to differ. Let me be pardoned ; that is what I ask.”

“Do you think I cherish ill-will for one warm word ?”

“I see you do not and cannot ; but just say, ‘Lucy, I forgive you !’ Say that, to ease me of the heart-ache.”

“Put away your heart-ache, as I will put away

mine: for you wounded me a little, Lucy. Now, when the pain is gone, I more than forgive: I feel grateful, as to a sincere well-wisher."

"I *am* your sincere well-wisher : you are right."

Thus our quarrel ended.

Reader, if in the course of this work, you find that my opinion of Dr. John, undergoes modification, excuse the seeming inconsistency. I give the feeling as at the time I felt it ; I describe the view of character as it appeared when discovered.

He showed the fineness of his nature by being kinder to me after that misunderstanding than before. Nay, the very incident which, by my theory, must in some degree estrange me and him, changed, indeed, somewhat our relations ; but not in the sense I painfully anticipated. An invisible, but a cold something, very slight, very transparent, but very chill : a sort of screen of ice had hitherto, all through our two lives, glazed the medium through which we exchanged intercourse. Those few warm words, though only warm with anger, breathed on that frail frost-work of reserve ; about this time, it gave note of dissolution. I think from that day, so long as we continued friends, he never in discourse stood on topics of ceremony with me. He

seemed to know that if he would but talk about himself, and about that in which he was most interested, my expectation would always be answered, my wish always satisfied. It follows, as a matter of course, that I continued to hear much of "Ginevra."

"Ginevra!" He thought her so fair, so good; he spoke so lovingly of her charms, her sweetness, her innocence, that, in spite of my plain prose knowledge of the reality, a kind of reflected glow began to settle on her idea, even for me. Still, reader, I am free to confess, that he often talked nonsense; but I strove to be unfailingly patient with him. I had had my lesson: I had learned how severe for me was the pain of crossing, or grieving, or disappointing him. In a strange and new sense, I grew most selfish, and quite powerless to deny myself the delight of indulging his mood, and being pliant to his will. He still seemed to me most absurd when he obstinately doubted, and desponded about his power to win in the end Miss Fanshawe's preference. The fancy became rooted in my own mind more stubbornly than ever, that she was only coquetting to goad him, and that, at heart, she coveted every one of his words and looks. Some-



times he harassed me, in spite of my resolution to bear and hear; in the midst of the indescribable gall-honey pleasure of thus bearing and hearing, he struck so on the flint of what firmness I owned, that it emitted fire once and again. I chanced to assert one day, with a view to stilling his impatience, that in my own mind, I felt positive Miss Fanshawe *must* intend eventually to accept him.

“Positive! It was easy to say so, but had I any grounds for such assurance?”

“The best grounds.”

“Now, Lucy, *do* tell me what!”

“You know them as well as I; and, knowing them Dr. John, it really amazes me that you should not repose the frankest confidence in her fidelity. To doubt, under the circumstances, is almost to insult.”

“Now you are beginning to speak fast and to breathe short; but speak a little faster and breathe a little shorter, till you have given an explanation—a full explanation: I must have it.”

“You shall, Dr. John. In some cases, you are a lavish, generous man: you are a worshipper ever ready with the votive offering; should Père Silas ever convert *you*, you will give him abundance of alms

for his poor, you will supply his altar with tapers, and the shrine of your favourite saint you will do your best to enrich : Ginevra, Dr. John——”

“Hush!” said he, “don’t go on.”

“Hush, I will *not* : and go on I *will*: Ginevra has had her hands filled from your hands more times than I can count. You have sought for her the costliest flowers ; you have busied your brain in devising gifts, the most delicate : such, one would have thought, as only a woman could have imagined ; and in addition, Miss Fanshawe owns a set of ornaments, to purchase which your generosity must have verged on extravagance.”

The modesty Ginevra herself had never evinced in this matter, now flushed all over the face of her admirer.

“Nonsense !” he said, destructively snipping a skein of silk with my scissors. “I offered them to please myself : I felt she did me a favour in accepting them.”

“She did more than a favour, Dr. John : she pledged her very honour that she would make you some return ; and if she cannot pay you in affection, she ought to hand out a business-like equivalent, in the shape of some rouleaux of gold pieces.”

“But you don’t understand her; she is far too disinterested to care for my gifts, and too simple-minded to know their value.”

I laughed out: I had heard her adjudge to every jewel its price; and well I knew money-embarrassment, money-schemes, money’s worth, and endeavours to realize supplies, had, young as she was, furnished the most frequent, and the favourite stimulus of her thoughts for years.

He pursued. “You should have seen her whenever I have laid on her lap some trifle; so cool, so unmoved: no eagerness to take, not even pleasure in contemplating. Just from amiable reluctance to grieve me, she would permit the bouquet to lie beside her, and perhaps consent to bear it away. Or, if I achieved the fastening of a bracelet on her ivory arm, however pretty the trinket might be (and I always carefully chose what seemed to *me* pretty, and what of course was not valueless), the glitter never dazzled her bright eyes: she would hardly cast one look on my gift.”

“Then, of course, not valuing it, she would unloose, and return it to you?”

“No; for such a repulse she was too good-natured. She would consent to seem to forget what

I had done, and retain the offering with lady-like quiet and easy oblivion. Under such circumstances, how can a man build on acceptance of his presents as a favourable symptom? For my part, were I to offer her all I have, and she to take it, such is her incapacity to be swayed by sordid considerations, I should not venture to believe the transaction advanced me one step."

"Dr John," I began, "Love is blind;" but just then a blue, subtle ray sped sideways from Dr. John's eye: it reminded me of old days, it reminded me of his picture: it half led me to think that part, at least, of his professed persuasion of Miss Fanshawe's *naïveté* was assumed; it led me dubiously to conjecture that perhaps, in spite of his passion for her beauty, his appreciation of her foibles might possibly be less mistaken, more clear-sighted, than from his general language was presumable. After all it might be only a chance look, or at best, the token of a merely momentary impression. Chance or intentional, real or imaginary, it closed the conversation.

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## CHAPTER XX.

## THE CLEOPATRA.

MY stay at La Terrasse was prolonged a fortnight beyond the close of the vacation. Mrs. Bretton's kind management procured me this respite. Her son having one day delivered the dictum that "Lucy was not yet strong enough to go back to that den of a Pensionnat," she at once drove over to the Rue Fossette, had an interview with the directress, and procured the indulgence, on the plea of prolonged rest and change being necessary to perfect recovery. Hereupon, however, followed an attention I could very well have dispensed with, viz.—a polite call from Madame Beck.

That lady—one fine day—actually came out in a fiacre as far as the chateau. I suppose she had resolved within herself to see what manner of place Dr. John inhabited. Apparently, the pleasant site

and neat interior surpassed her expectations; she eulogized all she saw, pronounced the blue salon “une pièce magnifique,” profusely congratulated me on the acquisition of friends, “tellement dignes, aimables, et respectables,” turned also a neat compliment in my favour, and, upon Dr. John coming in, ran up to him with the utmost buoyancy, opening at the same time such a fire of rapid language, all sparkling with felicitations and protestations about his “chateau,”—“madame sa mère, la digne châtelaine :” also his looks ; which indeed were very flourishing, and at the moment additionally embellished by the good-natured but amused smile with which he always listened to madame’s fluent and florid French. In short, Madame shone in her very best phase that day, and came in and went out quite a living catherine-wheel of compliments, delight, and affability. Half-purposely, and half to ask some question about school-business, I followed her to the carriage, and looked in after she was seated and the door closed. In that brief fraction of time what a change had been wrought! An instant ago, all sparkles and jests, she now sat sterner than a judge and graver than a sage. Strange little woman !

I went back and teased Dr. John about Madame's devotion to him. How he laughed! What fun shone in his eyes as he recalled some of her fine speeches, and repeated them, imitating her voluble delivery! He had an acute sense of humour, and was the finest company in the world—when he could forget Miss Fanshawe.

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To “sit in sunshine calm and sweet” is said to be excellent for weak people; it gives them vital force. When little Georgette Beck was recovering from her illness, I used to take her in my arms and walk with her in the garden by the hour together, beneath a certain wall hung with grapes, which the Southern sun was ripening: that sun cherished her little pale frame quite as effectually as it mellowed and swelled the clustering fruit.

There are human tempers, bland, glowing, and genial, within whose influence it is as good for the poor in spirit to live, as it is for the feeble in frame to bask in the glow of noon. Of the number of these choice natures were certainly both Dr. Bretton's and his mother's. They liked to communicate happiness, as some like to occasion misery: they did

it instinctively ; without fuss, and apparently, with little consciousness : the means to give pleasure rose spontaneously in their minds. Every day while I stayed with them, some little plan was proposed which resulted in beneficial enjoyment. Fully occupied as was Dr. John's time, he still made it in his way to accompany us in each brief excursion. I can hardly tell how he managed his engagements ; they were numerous, yet by dint of system, he classed them in an order which left him a daily period of liberty. I often saw him hard-worked, yet seldom over-driven ; and never irritated, confused, or oppressed. What he did was accomplished with the ease and grace of all-sufficing strength ; with the bountiful cheerfulness of high and unbroken energies. Under his guidance I saw, in that one happy fortnight, more of Villette, its environs, and its inhabitants, than I had seen in the whole eight months of my previous residence. He took me to places of interest in the town, of whose names I had not before so much as heard ; with willingness and spirit he communicated much note-worthy information. He never seemed to think it a trouble to talk to me, and, I am sure, it was never a task to me to listen. It was not his way to treat subjects

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coldly and vaguely; he rarely generalized, never prosed. He seemed to like nice details almost as much as I liked them myself; he seemed observant of character: and not superficially observant, either. These points gave the quality of interest to his discourse; and the fact of his speaking direct from his own resources, and not borrowing or stealing from books—here a dry fact, and there a trite phrase, and elsewhere a hackneyed opinion—ensured a freshness, as welcome as it was rare. Before my eyes, too, his disposition seemed to unfold another phase; to pass to a fresh day: to rise in new and nobler dawn.

His mother possessed a good development of benevolence, but he owned a better and larger. I found, on accompanying him to the Basse-Ville—the poor and crowded quarter of the city—that his errands there were as much those of the philanthropist as the physician. I understood presently that—cheerfully, habitually, and in single-minded unconsciousness of any special merit distinguishing his deeds—he was achieving, amongst a very wretched population, a world of active good. The lower orders liked him well; his poor patients in the hospitals welcomed him with a sort of enthusiasm.

But stop—I must not, from the faithful narrator, degenerate into the partial eulogist. Well, full well, do I know that Dr. John was not perfect, any more than I am perfect. Human fallibility leavened him throughout: there was no hour, and scarcely a moment of the times I spent with him, that in act, or speech, or look, he did not betray something that was not of a god. A god could not have the cruel vanity of Dr. John, nor his sometime levity. No immortal could have resembled him in his occasional temporary oblivion of all but the present—in his passing passion for that present; shown not coarsely, by devoting it to material indulgence, but selfishly, by extracting from it whatever it could yield of nutriment to his masculine self-love: his delight was to feed that ravenous sentiment, without thought of the price of provender, or care for the cost of keeping it sleek and high-pampered.

The reader is requested to note a seeming contradiction in the two views which have been given of Graham Bretton—the public and private—the out-door and the in-door view. In the first, the public, he is shown oblivious of self; as modest in the display of his energies, as earnest in their exercise. In the second, the fireside picture, there is

expressed consciousness of what he has and what he is; pleasure in homage, some recklessness in exciting, some vanity in receiving the same. Both portraits are correct.

It was hardly possible to oblige Dr. John quietly and in secret. When you thought that the fabrication of some trifle dedicated to his use had been achieved unnoticed, and that, like other men, he would use it when placed ready for his use, and never ask whence it came, he amazed you by a smilingly-uttered observation or two proving that his eye had been on the work from commencement to close: that he had noted the design, traced its progress, and marked its completion. It pleased him to be thus served, and he let his pleasure beam in his eye and play about his mouth.

This would have been all very well, if he had not added to such kindly and unobtrusive evidence a certain wilfulness in discharging what he called debts. When his mother worked for him, he paid her by showering about her his bright animal spirits, with even more affluence than his gay, taunting, teasing, loving wont. If Lucy Snowe were discovered to have put her hand to such work, he planned, in recompense, some pleasant recreation.

I often felt amazed at his perfect knowledge of Villette; a knowledge not merely confined to its open streets, but penetrating to all its galleries, salles, and cabinets: of every door which shut in an object worth seeing, of every museum, of every hall, sacred to art or science, he seemed to possess the "Open! Sesame." I never had a head for science, but an ignorant, blind, fond instinct inclined me to art. I liked to visit the picture-galleries, and I dearly liked to be left there alone. In company, a wretched idiosyncrasy forbade me to see much or to feel anything. In unfamiliar company, where it was necessary to maintain a flow of talk on the subjects in presence, half an hour would knock me up, with a combined pressure of physical lassitude and entire mental incapacity. I never yet saw the well-reared child, much less the educated adult, who could not put me to shame, by the sustained intelligence of its demeanour under the ordeal of a conversable sociable visitation of pictures, historical sites or buildings, or any lions of public interest. Dr. Bretton was a cicerone after my own heart; he would take me betimes, ere the galleries were filled, leave me there for two or three hours, and call for me when his own engagements were discharged.

Meantime, I was happy ; happy, not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning, and forming conclusions. In the commencement of these visits, there was some misunderstanding and consequent struggle between Will and Power. The former faculty exacted approbation of that which it was considered orthodox to admire ; the latter groaned forth its utter inability to pay the tax ; it was then self-sneered at, spurred up, goaded on to refine its taste, and whet its zest. The more it was chidden, however, the more it wouldn't praise. Discovering gradually that a wonderful sense of fatigue resulted from these conscientious efforts, I began to reflect whether I might not dispense with that great labour, and concluded eventually that I might, and so sank supine into a luxury of calm before ninety-nine out of a hundred of the exhibited frames.

It seemed to me that an original and good picture was just as scarce as an original and good book ; nor did I, in the end, tremble to say to myself, standing before certain *chef d'œuvres* bearing great names, " These are not a whit like nature. Nature's daylight never had that colour ; never was made so turbid, either by storm or cloud, as it is laid out there, under a sky of indigo : and that

indigo is not ether ; and those dark weeds plastered upon it are not trees." Several very well executed and complacent-looking fat women struck me as by no means the goddesses they appeared to consider themselves. Many scores of marvellously-finished little Flemish pictures, and also of sketches, excellent for fashion-books, displaying varied costumes in the handsomest materials, gave evidence of laudable industry whimsically applied. And yet there were fragments of truth here and there which satisfied the conscience, and gleams of light that cheered the vision. Nature's power here broke through in a mountain snow-storm ; and there her glory in a sunny southern day. An expression in this portrait proved clear insight into character ; a face in that historical painting, by its vivid filial likeness, startlingly reminded you that genius gave it birth. These exceptions I loved : they grew dear as friends.

One day, at a quiet early hour, I found myself nearly alone in a certain gallery, wherein one particular picture of pretentious size, set up in the best light, having a cordon of protection stretched before it, and a cushioned bench duly set in front for the accommodation of worshipping connoisseurs, who,

having gazed themselves off their feet, might be fain to complete the business sitting: this picture, I say, seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection.

It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life. I calculated that this lady, put into a scale of magnitude suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk, would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment. Then,

for the wretched untidiness surrounding her, there could be no excuse. Pots and pans—perhaps I ought to say vases and goblets—were rolled here and there on the foreground; a perfect rubbish of flowers was mixed amongst them, and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch and cumbered the floor. On referring to the catalogue, I found that this notable production bore name “Cleopatra.”

Well, I was sitting wondering at it (as the bench was there, I thought I might as well take advantage of its accommodation), and thinking that while some of the details—as roses, gold cups, jewels, &c.—were very prettily painted, it was on the whole an enormous piece of claptrap; the room, almost vacant when I entered, began to fill. Scarcely noticing this circumstance (as, indeed, it did not matter to me) I retained my seat; rather to rest myself than with a view to studying this huge, dark-complexioned gipsy-queen; of whom, indeed, I soon tired, and betook myself for refreshment to the contemplation of some exquisite little pictures of still life: wild-flowers, wild-fruit, mossy wood-nests, casketing eggs that looked like pearls seen through clear green sea-water; all hung



modestly beneath that coarse and preposterous canvass.

Suddenly a light tap visited my shoulder. Starting, turning, I met a face bent to encounter mine; a frowning, almost a shocked face it was.

“Que faites vous ici?” said a voice.

“Mais, monsieur, je m’ amuse.”

“Vous vous amusez! et à quoi, s’il vous plait? Mais d’abord, faites-moi le plaisir de vous lever: prenez mon bras, et allons de l’autre côté.”

I did precisely as I was bid. M. Paul Emanuel (it was he) returned from Rome, and now a travelled man, was not likely to be less tolerant of insubordination now, than before this added distinction laurelled his temples.

“Permit me to conduct you to your party,” said he, as we crossed the room.

“I have no party.”

“You are not alone?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Did you come here unaccompanied?”

“No, monsieur. Dr. Bretton brought me here.”

“Dr. Bretton and Madame his mother, of course?”

"No; only Dr. Bretton."

"And he told you to look at *that* picture?"

"By no means: I found it out for myself."

M. Paul's hair was shorn close as raven down, or I think it would have bristled on his head. Beginning now to perceive his drift, I had a certain pleasure in keeping cool, and working him up.

"Astounding insular audacity!" cried the Professor. "*Singulières femmes que ces Anglaises!*"

"What is the matter, monsieur?"

"Matter! How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?"

"It is a very ugly picture, but I cannot at all see why I should not look at it."

"Bon! bon! Speak no more of it. But you ought not to be here alone."

"If, however, I have no society—no *party*, as you say? And then, what does it signify whether I am alone, or accompanied? nobody meddles with me."

"Taisez-vous, et asseyez-vous là—là!" Setting down a chair with emphasis in a particularly dull corner, before a series of most specially dreary "cadres."

“Mais, monsieur.”

“Mais, mademoiselle, asseyez vous, et ne bougez pas—entendez-vous? jusqu’ à ce qu’on vienne vous chercher, ou que je vous donne la permission.”

“Quel triste coin!” cried I, “et quels laidstableaux!”

And “laid,” indeed, they were; being a set of four, denominated in the catalogue “La vie d’une femme.” They were painted rather in a remarkable style—flat, dead, pale and formal. The first represented a “Jeune Fille,” coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up—the image of a most villanous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a “Mariée” with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a “Jeune Mère,” hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a “Veuve,” being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument, set up in a corner of some Père la Chaise. All these four “Ange” were grim and

gray as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with ! insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities ! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers.

It was impossible to keep one's attention long confined to these masterpieces, and so, by degrees, I veered round, and surveyed the gallery.

A perfect crowd of spectators was by this time gathered round the Lioness, from whose vicinage I had been banished ; nearly half this crowd were ladies, but M. Paul afterwards told me, these were "des dames," and it was quite proper for them to contemplate what no "demoiselle" ought to glance at. I assured him plainly I could not agree in this doctrine, and did not see the sense of it ; whereupon, with his usual absolutism, he merely requested my silence, and also, in the same breath, denounced my mingled rashness and ignorance. A more despotic little man than M. Paul never filled a professor's chair. I noticed, by the way, that he looked at the picture himself quite at his ease, and for a very long while : he did not, however, neglect to glance from time to time my way, in order, I suppose, to make sure that I

was obeying orders, and not breaking bounds. By and by, he again accosted me.

“Had I not been ill?” he wished to know :  
“he understood I had.”

“Yes, but I was now quite well.”

“Where had I spent the vacation?”

“Chiefly in the Rue Fossette; partly with Madame Bretton.”

“He had heard that I was left alone in the Rue Fossette; was that so?”

“Not quite alone: Marie Broc” (the crétin) “was with me.”

He shrugged his shoulders; varied and contradictory expressions played rapidly over his countenance. Marie Broc was well known to M. Paul; he never gave a lesson in the third division (containing the least advanced pupils), that she did not occasion in him a sharp conflict between antagonistic impressions. Her personal appearance, her repulsive manners, her often unmanageable disposition, irritated his temper, and inspired him with strong antipathy; a feeling he was too apt to conceive when his taste was offended or his will thwarted. On the other hand, her misfortunes constituted a strong claim on his forbearance and compassion—

such a claim as it was not in his nature to deny ; hence resulted almost daily drawn battles between impatience and disgust on the one hand, pity and a sense of justice on the other ; in which, to his credit be it said, it was very seldom that the former feelings prevailed : when they did, however, M. Paul showed a phase of character which had its terrors. His passions were strong, his aversions and attachments alike vivid ; the force he exerted in holding both in check, by no means mitigated an observer's sense of their vehemence. With such tendencies, it may well be supposed he often excited in ordinary minds fear and dislike ; yet it was an error to fear him : nothing drove him so nearly frantic as the tremor of an apprehensive and distrustful spirit ; nothing soothed him like confidence tempered with gentleness. To evince these sentiments, however, required a thorough comprehension of his nature ; and his nature was of an order rarely comprehended.

“ How did you get on with Marie Broc ? ” he asked, after some minutes' silence.

“ Monsieur, I did my best ; but it was terrible to be alone with her ! ”

“ You have, then, a weak heart ! You lack courage ; and, perhaps, charity. Yours are not the

qualities which might constitute a Sister of Mercy."

[He was a religious little man, in his way: the self-denying and self-sacrificing part of the Catholic religion commanded the homage of his soul.]

"I don't know, indeed: I took as good care of her as I could; but when her aunt came to fetch her away, it was a great relief."

"Ah! you are an egotist. There are women who have nursed hospitals-full of similar unfortunates. You could not do that?"

"Could Monsieur do it himself?"

"Women who are worthy the name ought infinitely to surpass our coarse, fallible, self-indulgent sex, in the power to perform such duties."

"I washed her, I kept her clean, I fed her, I tried to amuse her; but she made mouths at me instead of speaking."

"You think you did great things?"

"No; but as great as I *could* do."

"Then limited are your powers, for in tending one idiot, you fell sick."

"Not with that, monsieur; I had a nervous fever: my mind was ill."

"Vraiment! Vous valez peu de chose. You are

not cast in an heroic mould ; your courage will not avail to sustain you in solitude ; it merely gives you the temerity to gaze with sang-froid at pictures of Cleopatra."

It would have been easy to show anger at the teasing, hostile tone of the little man. I had never been angry with him yet, however, and had no present disposition to begin.

"Cleopatra!" I repeated, quietly. "Monsieur, too, has been looking at Cleopatra ; what does he think of her?"

"Cela ne vaut rien," he responded. "Une femme superbe—une taille d'imperatrice, des formes de Junon, mais une personne dont je ne voudrais ni pour femme, ni pour fille, ni pour sœur. Aussi vous ne jeterez plus un seul coup d'œil de sa côté."

"But I have looked at her a great many times while Monsieur has been talking : I can see her quite well from this corner."

"Turn to the wall and study your four pictures of a woman's life."

"Excuse me, M. Paul ; they are too hideous : but if you admire them, allow me to vacate my seat and leave you to their contemplation."

"Mademoiselle," he said, grimacing a half-smile,



or what he intended for a smile, though it was but a grim and hurried manifestation. "You nurslings of Protestantism astonish me. You unguarded Englishwomen walk calmly amidst red-hot ploughshares and escape burning. I believe, if some of you were thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's hottest furnace, you would issue forth untraversed by the smell of fire."

"Will Monsieur have the goodness to move an inch to one side?"

"How! At what are you gazing now? You are not recognizing an acquaintance amongst that group of *jeunes gens*?"

"I think so——Yes, I see there a person I know."

In fact, I had caught a glimpse of a head too pretty to belong to any other than the redoubted Colonel de Hamal. What a very finished, highly-polished little pate it was! What a figure, so trim and natty! What womanish feet and hands! How daintily he held a glass to one of his optics! with what admiration he gazed upon the Cleopatra! and then, how engagingly he tittered and whispered a friend at his elbow! Oh, the man of sense! Oh, the refined gentleman of superior taste

and tact ! I observed him for about ten minutes, and perceived that he was exceedingly taken with this dusk and portly Venus of the Nile. So much was I interested in his bearing, so absorbed in divining his character by his looks and movements, I temporarily forgot M. Paul ; in the interim a group came between that gentleman and me ; or possibly his scruples might have received another and worse shock from my present abstraction, causing him to withdraw voluntarily : at any rate, when I again looked round, he was gone.

My eye, pursuant of the search, met not him, but another and dissimilar figure, well seen amidst the crowd, for the height as well as the port lent each its distinction. This way came Dr. John, in visage, in shape, in hue, as unlike the dark, acerb, and caustic little professor, as the fruit of the Hesperides might be unlike the sloe in the wild thicket ; as the high-couraged but tractable Arabian is unlike the rude and stubborn "sheltie." He was looking for me, but had not yet explored the corner where the schoolmaster had just put me. I remained quiet ; yet another minute I would watch.

He approached de Hamal ; he paused near him ;

I thought he had a pleasure in looking over his head; Dr. Bretton, too, gazed on the Cleopatra. I doubt if it were to his taste: he did not simper like the little Count; his mouth looked fastidious, his eye cool; without demonstration he stepped aside, leaving room for others to approach. I saw now that he was waiting, and, rising, I joined him.

We took one turn round the gallery; with Graham it was very pleasant to take such a turn. I always liked dearly to hear what he had to say about either pictures or books; because, without pretending to be a connoisseur, he always spoke his thought, and that was sure to be fresh: very often it was also just and pithy. It was pleasant also to tell him some things he did not know—he listened so kindly, so teachably; unformalized by scruples lest so to bend his bright handsome head, to gather a woman's rather obscure and stammering explanation, should imperil the dignity of his manhood. And when he communicated information in return, it was with a lucid intelligence that left all his words clear graven on the memory: no explanation of his giving, no fact of his narrating, did I ever forget.

As we left the gallery, I asked him what he

thought of the Cleopatra (after making him laugh by telling him how Professor Emanuel had sent me to the right-about, and taking him to see the sweet series of pictures recommended to my attention.)

“Pooh!” said he, “My mother is a better-looking woman. I heard some French fops, yonder, designating her as ‘le type du voluptueux;’ if so, I can only say, ‘le voluptueux’ is little to my liking. Compare that mulatto with Ginevra!”

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE CONCERT.

ONE morning, Mrs. Bretton, coming promptly into my room, desired me to open my drawers and show her my dresses; which I did, without a word.

"That will do," said she, when she had turned them over. "You must have a new one."

She went out. She returned presently with a dress-maker. She had me measured. "I mean," said she, "to follow my own taste, and to have my own way in this little matter."

Two days after came home—a pink dress!

"That is not for me," I said, hurriedly, feeling that I would almost as soon clothe myself in the costume of a Chinese lady of rank.

"We shall see whether it is for you or not,"

rejoined my godmother, adding with her resistless decision. "Mark my words. You will wear it this very evening."

I thought I should not: I thought no human force should avail to put me into it. A pink dress ! I knew it not. It knew not me. I had not proved it.

My godmother went on to decree that I was to go with her and Graham to a concert that same night: which concert, she explained, was a grand affair to be held in the large salle, or hall of the principal musical society. The most advanced of the pupils of the Conservatoire were to perform: it was to be followed by a lottery "au bénéfice des pauvres;" and to crown all, the King, Queen, and Prince of Labassecour were to be present. Graham, in sending tickets, had enjoined attention to costume as a compliment due to royalty: he also recommended punctual readiness by seven o'clock.

About six, I was ushered up-stairs. Without any force at all, I found myself led and influenced by another's will, unconsulted, unpersuaded, quietly over-ruled. In short the pink dress went on, softened by some drapery of black lace. I was pronounced to be *en grande tenue*, and requested

to look in the glass. I did so with some fear and trembling ; with more fear and trembling, I turned away. Seven o'clock struck ; Dr. Bretton was come ; my godmother and I went down. *She* was clad in brown velvet ; as I walked in her shadow, how I envied her those folds of grave, dark majesty ! Graham stood in the drawing-room doorway.

"I *do* hope he will not think I have been decking myself out to draw attention," was my uneasy aspiration.

"Here, Lucy, are some flowers," said he, giving me a bouquet. He took no further notice of my dress than was conveyed in a kind smile and satisfied nod, which calmed at once my sense of shame and fear of ridicule. For the rest, the dress was made with extreme simplicity, guiltless of flounce or furbelow ; it was but the light fabric and bright tint which scared me, and since Graham found in it nothing absurd, my own eye consented soon to become reconciled.

I suppose people who go every night to places of public amusement, can hardly enter into the fresh gala feeling with which an opera or a concert is enjoyed by those for whom it is a rarity. I am

not sure that I expected great pleasure from the concert, having but a very vague notion of its nature, but I liked the drive there well. The snug comfort of the close carriage on a cold though fine night, the pleasure of setting out with companions so cheerful and friendly, the sight of the stars glinting fitfully through the trees as we rolled along the avenue; then the freer burst of the night-sky when we issued forth to the open *chaussée*, the passage through the city gates, the lights there burning, the guards there posted, the pretence of inspection to which we there submitted, and which amused us so much—all these small matters had for me, in their novelty, a peculiar exhilarating charm. How much of it lay in the atmosphere of friendship diffused about me, I know not: Dr. John and his mother were both in their finest mood, contending animatedly with each other the whole way, and as frankly kind to me as if I had been of their kin.

Our way lay through some of the best streets of Villette, streets brightly lit, and far more lively now than at high noon. How brilliant seemed the shops! How glad, gay, and abundant flowed the tide of life along the broad pavement! While I



looked, the thought of the Rue Fossette came across me—of the walled-in garden and school-house, and of the dark, vast “classes,” where, as at this very hour, it was my wont to wander all solitary, gazing at the stars through the high, blindless windows, and listening to the distant voice of the reader in the refectory, monotonously exercised upon the “lecture pieuse.” Thus must I soon again listen and wander; and this shadow of the future stole with timely sobriety across the radiant present.

By this time we had got into a current of carriages all tending in one direction, and soon the front of a great illuminated building blazed before us. Of what I should see within this building, I had, as before intimated, but an imperfect idea; for no place of public entertainment had it ever been my lot to enter yet.

We alighted under a portico where there was a great bustle and a great crowd, but I do not distinctly remember further details, until I found myself mounting a majestic staircase wide and easy of ascent, deeply and softly carpeted with crimson, leading up to great doors closed solemnly, and whose panels were also crimson-clothed.

I hardly noticed by what magic these doors were made to roll back—Dr. John managed these points; roll back they did, however, and within was disclosed a hall—grand, wide, and high, whose sweeping circular walls, and domed hollow ceiling, seemed to me all dead gold (thus with nice art was it stained), relieved by cornicing, fluting and garlandry, either bright, like gold burnished, or snow-white, like alabaster, or white and gold mingled in wreaths of gilded leaves and spotless lilies: wherever drapery hung, wherever carpets were spread, or cushions placed, the sole colour employed was deep crimson. Pendant from the dome, flamed a mass that dazzled me—a mass, I thought, of rock-crystal, sparkling with facets, streaming with drops, ablaze with stars, and gorgeously tinged with dews of gems dissolved, or fragments of rainbows shivered. It was only the chandelier, reader, but for me it seemed the work of eastern genii: I almost looked to see if a huge, dark cloudy hand—that of the Slave of the Lamp—were not hovering in the lustrous and perfumed atmosphere of the cupola, guarding its wondrous treasure.

We moved on—I was not at all conscious whither—but at some turn we suddenly encountered ano-

ther party approaching from the opposite direction. I just now see that group, as it flashed upon me for one moment. A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son—the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle.

I noted them all—the third person as well as the other two—and for the fraction of a moment, believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the “giftie” of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse.

At last, we were seated in places commanding a good general view of that vast and dazzling, but warm and cheerful hall. Already it was filled, and filled with a splendid assemblage. I do not know that the women were very beautiful, but their dresses

were so perfect; and foreigners, even such as are ungraceful in domestic privacy, seem to possess the art of appearing graceful in public: however blunt and boisterous those every-day and home movements connected with peignoir and papillotes, there is a slide, a bend, a carriage of the head and arms, a mien of the mouth and eyes, kept nicely in reserve for gala use—always brought out with the *grande toilette*, and duly put on with the “*parure*.”

Some fine forms there were here and there, models of a peculiar style of beauty; a style, I think, never seen in England: a solid, firm-set, sculptural style. These shapes have no angles: a caryatid in marble is almost as flexible; a Phidian goddess is not more perfect in a certain still and stately sort. They have such features as the Dutch painters give to their madonnas: low-country classic features, regular but round, straight but stolid; and for their depth of expressionless calm, of passionless peace, a polar snow-field could alone offer a type. Women of this order need no ornament, and they seldom wear any; the smooth hair, closely braided, supplies a sufficient contrast to the smoother cheek and brow; the dress cannot be too simple; the

rounded arm and perfect neck require neither bracelet nor chain.

With one of these beauties I once had the honour and rapture to be perfectly acquainted: the inert force of the deep, settled love she bore herself, was wonderful; it could only be surpassed by her proud impotency to care for any other living thing. Of blood, her cool veins conducted no flow; placid lymph filled and almost obstructed her arteries.

Such a Juno as I have described, sat full in our view—a sort of mark for all eyes, and quite conscious that so she was, but proof to the magnetic influence of gaze or glance: cold, rounded, blonde, and beauteous, as the white column, capitalled with gilding, which rose at her side.

Observing that Dr. John's attention was much drawn towards her, I entreated him in a low voice “for the love of heaven to shield well his heart. You need not fall in love with *that* lady,” I said, “because, I tell you before-hand, you might die at her feet, and she would not love you again.”

“Very well,” said he, “and how do you know that the spectacle of her grand insensibility might not with me be the strongest stimulus to homage?”

The sting of desperation is, I think, a wonderful irritant to my emotions: but (shrugging his shoulders) you know nothing about these things; I'll address myself to my mother. Mama, I'm in a dangerous way."

"As if that interested me!" said Mrs. Bretton.

"Alas! the cruelty of my lot!" responded her son. "Never man had a more unsentimental mother than mine: she never seems to think that such a calamity can befall her as a daughter-in-law."

"If I don't, it is not for want of having that same calamity held over my head: you have threatened me with it for the last ten years. 'Mama, I am going to be married soon!' was the cry before you were well out of jackets."

"But, mother, one of these days it will be realized. All of a sudden, when you think you are most secure, I shall go forth like Jacob or Esau, or any other patriarch, and take me a wife: perhaps of these which are of the daughters of the land."

"At your peril, John Graham! that is all."

"This mother of mine means me to be an old bachelor. What a jealous old lady it is! But now just look at that splendid creature in the pale blue

satin dress, and hair of paler brown, with 'reflets satinés' as those of her robe. Would you not feel proud, mama, if I were to bring that goddess home some day, and introduce her to you as Mrs. Bretton, junior?"

"You will bring no goddess to La Terrasse: that little chateau will not contain two mistresses; especially if the second be of the height, bulk, and circumference of that mighty doll in wood and wax, and kid and satin."

"Mama, she would fill your blue chair so admirably!"

"Fill my chair? I defy the foreign usurper! a rueful chair should it be for her: but hush, John Graham! Hold your tongue, and use your eyes."

During the above skirmish, the hall which, I had thought, seemed full at our entrance, continued to admit party after party, until the semicircle before the stage presented one dense mass of heads, sloping from floor to ceiling. The stage, too, or rather the wide temporary platform, larger than any stage, desert half an hour since, was now overflowing with life; round two grand pianos, placed about the centre, a white flock of young girls, the pupils of the Conservatoire, had noiselessly poured.

I had noticed their gathering, while Graham and his mother were engaged in discussing the belle in blue satin, and had watched with interest the process of arraying and marshalling them. Two gentlemen, in each of whom I recognized an acquaintance, officered this virgin troop. One, an artistic looking man, bearded, and with long hair, was a noted pianiste, and also the first music teacher in Villette; he attended twice a week at Madame Beck's pensionat, to give lessons to the few pupils whose parents were rich enough to allow their daughters the privilege of his instructions; his name was M. Josef Emanuel, and he was half-brother to M. Paul: which potent personage was now visible in the person of the second gentleman.

M. Paul amused me; I smiled to myself as I watched him, he seemed so thoroughly in his element—standing conspicuous in presence of a wide and grand assemblage, arranging, restraining, over-aweing about one hundred young ladies. He was, too, so perfectly in earnest—so energetic, so intent, and, above all, so absolute: and yet what business had he there? What had he to do with music or the Conservatoire—he who could hardly distinguish one note from another? I knew that it



was his love of display and authority which had brought him there—a love not offensive, only because so naïve. It presently became obvious that his brother, M. Josef, was as much under his control as were the girls themselves. Never was such a little hawk of a man as that M. Paul! Ere long, some noted singers and musicians dawned upon the platform: as these stars rose, the comet-like professor set. Insufferable to him were all notorieties and celebrities: where he could not outshine, he fled.

And now all was prepared: but one compartment of the hall waited to be filled—a compartment covered with crimson, like the grand staircase and doors, furnished with stuffed and cushioned benches, ranged on each side of two red regal chairs, placed solemnly under a canopy.

A signal was given, the doors rolled back, the assembly stood up, the orchestra burst out, and, to the welcome of a choral burst, enter the King, the Queen, the Court of Labassecour.

Till then, I had never set eyes on living king or queen; it may consequently be conjectured how I strained my powers of vision to take in these specimens of European royalty. By whomsoever majesty is beheld for the first time, there will always

be experienced a vague surprise bordering on disappointment, that the same does not appear seated, en permanence, on a throne, bonneted with a crown, and furnished, as to the hand, with a sceptre. Looking out for a king and queen, and seeing only a middle-aged soldier and a rather young lady, I felt half cheated, half pleased.

Well do I recall that King—a man of fifty, a little bowed, a little gray: there was no face in all that assembly which resembled his. I had never read, never been told anything of his nature or his habits; and at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with iron stylet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct. Ere long, however, if I did not *know*, at least I *felt*, the meaning of those characters written without hand. There sat a silent sufferer—a nervous, melancholy man. Those eyes had looked on the visits of a certain ghost—had long waited the comings and goings of that strangest spectre, Hypochondria. Perhaps he saw her now on that stage, over against him, amidst all that brilliant throng. Hypochondria has that wont, to rise in the midst of thousands—dark as Doom, pale as Malady, and well nigh strong as Death. Her comrade

and victim thinks to be happy one moment—"Not so," says she; "I come." And she freezes the blood in his heart, and beclouds the light in his eye.

Some might say it was the foreign crown pressing the King's brows which bent them to that peculiar and painful fold; some might quote the effects of early bereavement. Something there might be of both these; but these as embittered by that darkest foe of humanity—constitutional melancholy. The Queen, his wife, knew this: it seemed to me, the reflection of her husband's grief lay, a subduing shadow, on her own benignant face. A mild, thoughtful, graceful woman that princess seemed; not beautiful, not at all like the women of solid charms and marble feelings described a page or two since. Hers was a somewhat slender shape; her features, though distinguished enough, were too suggestive of reigning dynasties and royal lines to give unqualified pleasure. The expression clothing that profile was agreeable in the present instance; but you could not avoid connecting it with remembered effigies, where similar lines appeared, under phase ignoble; feeble, or sensual, or cunning, as the case might be. The Queen's eye, however, was her own; and pity, goodness,

sweet sympathy, blessed it with divinest light. She moved no sovereign, but a lady—kind, loving, elegant. Her little son, the Prince of Labassecour, and young Duc de Dindonneau, accompanied her: he leaned on his mother's knee; and, ever and anon, in the course of that evening, I saw her observant of the monarch at her side, conscious of his beclouded abstraction, and desirous to rouse him from it by drawing his attention to their son. She often bent her head to listen to the boy's remarks, and would then smilingly repeat them to his sire. The moody King started, listened, smiled, but invariably relapsed as soon as his good angel ceased speaking. Full mournful and significant was that spectacle! Not the less so because, both for the aristocracy and the honest bourgeoisie of Labassecour, its peculiarity seemed to be wholly invisible: I could not discover that one soul present was either struck or touched.

With the King and Queen had entered their court, comprising two or three foreign ambassadors; and with them came the élite of the foreigners then resident in Villette. These took possession of the crimson benches; the ladies were seated; most of the men remained standing: their sable rank,

lining the back ground, looked like a dark foil to the splendour displayed in front. Nor was this splendour without varying light and shade and gradation: the middle distance was filled with matrons in velvets and satins, in plumes and gems; the benches in the foreground, to the Queen's right hand, seemed devoted exclusively to young girls, the flower—perhaps, I should rather say, the bud—of Villette aristocracy. Here were no jewels, no head-dresses, no velvet pile or silken sheen: purity, simplicity, and aërial grace reigned in that virgin band. Young heads simply braided, and fair forms (I was going to write *sylph* forms, but that would have been quite untrue: several of these “jeunes filles,” who had not numbered more than sixteen or seventeen years, boasted contours as robust and solid as those of a stout Englishwoman of five-and-twenty)—fair forms robed in white, or pale rose, or placid blue, suggested thoughts of heaven and angels. I knew a couple, at least, of these “rose et blanches” specimens of humanity. Here was a pair of Madame Beck's late pupils—Mesdemoiselles Mathilde and Angélique: pupils, who, during their last year at school, ought to have been in the first class, but whose brains had never got them beyond

the second division. In English, they had been under my own charge, and hard work it was to get them to translate rationally a page of "The Vicar of Wakefield." Also during three months I had one of them for my vis-à-vis at table, and the quantity of household bread, butter, and stewed fruit, she would habitually consume at "second dejeuner" was a real world's wonder—to be exceeded only by the fact of her actually pocketing slices she could not eat. Here be truths—wholesome truths, too.

I knew another of these seraphs—the prettiest, or, at any rate, the least demure and hypocritical-looking of the lot: she was seated by the daughter of an English peer, also an honest, though haughty-looking girl; both had entered in the suite of the British embassy. She (*i.e.* my acquaintance) had a slight pliant figure, not at all like the forms of the foreign damsels; her hair, too, was not close-braided, like a shell or a skull-cap of satin; it looked *like* hair, and waved from her head, long, curled, and flowing. She chatted away volubly, and seemed full of a light-headed sort of satisfaction with herself and her position. I did not look at Dr. Bretton; but I knew that

he, too, saw Ginevra Fanshawe: he had become so quiet, he answered so briefly his mother's remarks, he so often suppressed a sigh. Why should he sigh? He had confessed a taste for the pursuit of love under difficulties; here was full gratification for that taste. His lady-love beamed upon him from a sphere above his own: he could not come near her; he was not certain that he could win from her a look. I watched to see if she would so far favour him. Our seat was not far from the crimson benches; we must inevitably be seen thence, by eyes so quick and roving as Miss Fanshawe's, and very soon those optics of hers were upon us: at least, upon Dr. and Mrs. Bretton. I kept rather in the shade and out of sight, not wishing to be immediately recognized: she looked quite steadily at Dr. John, and then she raised a glass to examine his mother; a minute or two afterwards she laughingly whispered her neighbour; upon the performance commencing, her rambling attention was attracted to the platform.

On the concert I need not dwell; the reader would not care to have my impressions thereanent: and, indeed, it would not be worth while to record them, as they were the impressions of an ignorance

crasse. The young ladies of the Conservatoire, being very much frightened, made rather a tremulous exhibition on the two grand pianos. M. Josef Emanuel stood by them while they played; but he had not the tact or influence of his kinsman, who, under similar circumstances, would certainly have *compelled* pupils of his to demean themselves with heroism and self-possession. M. Paul would have placed the hysteric débutantes between two fires—terror of the audience, and terror of himself—and would have inspired them with the courage of desperation, by making the latter terror incomparably the greater: M. Josef could not do this.

Following the white muslin pianistes, came a fine, full-grown, sulky lady in white satin. She sang. Her singing just affected me like the tricks of a conjuror: I wondered how she did it—how she made her voice run up and down, and cut such marvellous capers; but a simple Scotch melody, played by a rude street minstrel, has often moved me more deeply.

Afterwards stepped forth a gentleman, who, bending his body a good deal in the direction of the King and Queen, and frequently [approaching his white-gloved hand to the region of his heart,



vented a bitter outcry against a certain "fausse Isabelle." I thought he seemed especially to solicit the Queen's sympathy; but, unless I am egregiously mistaken, her Majesty lent her attention rather with the calm of courtesy than the earnestness of interest. This gentleman's state of mind was very harrowing, and I was glad when he wound up his musical exposition of the same.

Some rousing choruses struck me as the best part of the evening's entertainment. There were present, deputies from all the best provincial choral societies; genuine, barrel-shaped, native Labasse-couriens. These worthies gave voice without mincing the matter: their hearty exertions had at least this good result—the ear drank thence a satisfying sense of power.

Through the whole performance—timid instrumental duets, conceited vocal solos, sonorous, brass-lunged choruses—my attention gave but one eye and one ear to the stage, the other being permanently retained in the service of Dr. Bretton: I could not forget him, nor cease to question how he was feeling, what he was thinking, whether he was amused or the contrary. At last he spoke.

“And how do you like it all, Lucy? You are very quiet,” he said, in his own cheerful tone.

“I am quiet,” I said, “because I am so very, *very* much interested: not merely with the music, but with everything about me.”

He then proceeded to make some further remarks, with so much equanimity and composure that I began to think he had really not seen what I had seen, and I whispered—

“Miss Fanshawe is here: have you noticed her?”

“Oh, yes! and I observed that you noticed her too.”

“Is she come with Mrs. Cholmondeley, do you think?”

“Mrs. Cholmondeley is there with a very grand party. Yes: Ginevra was in *her* train; and Mrs. Cholmondeley was in Lady \* \* \* 's train, who was in the Queen's train. If this were not one of the compact little minor European courts, whose very formalities are little more imposing than familiarities, and whose gala grandeur is but homeliness in Sunday array, it would sound all very fine.”

“Ginevra saw you, I think?”

“So do I think so. I have had my eye on her several times since you withdrew yours; and I have had the honour of witnessing a little spectacle which you were spared.”

I did not ask what: I waited voluntary information; which was presently given.

“Miss Fanshawe,” he said, “has a companion with her—a lady of rank. I happen to know Lady Sara by sight; her noble mother has called me in professionally. She is a proud girl, but not in the least insolent, and I doubt whether Ginevra will have gained ground in her estimation by making a butt of her neighbours.”

“What neighbours?”

“Merely myself and my mother. As to me it is all very natural: nothing, I suppose, can be fairer game than the young bourgeois doctor; but my mother? I never saw her ridiculed before. Do you know, the curling lip, and sarcastically levelled glass thus directed, gave me a most curious sensation?”

“Think nothing of it, Dr. John: it is not worth while. If Ginevra were in a giddy mood, as she is eminently to-night, she would make no scruple of laughing at that mild, pensive Queen, or that

melancholy King. She is not actuated by malevolence, but sheer, heedless folly. To a feather-brained school-girl nothing is sacred."

"But you forget: I have not been accustomed to look on Miss Fanshawe in the light of a feather-brained school-girl. Was she not my divinity—the angel of my career?"

"Hem! There was your mistake."

"To speak the honest truth, without any false rant or assumed romance, there actually was a moment, six months ago, when I thought her divine. Do you remember our conversation about the presents? I was not quite open with you in discussing that subject: the warmth with which you took it up amused me. By way of having the full benefit of your lights, I allowed you to think me more in the dark than I really was. It was that test of the presents which first proved Ginevra mortal. Still her beauty retained its fascination: three days—three hours ago, I was very much her slave. As she passed me to-night, triumphant in beauty, my emotions did her homage; but for one luckless sneer, I should yet be the humblest of her servants. She might have scoffed at me, and, while wounding, she would not soon have

alienated me: through myself, she could not in ten years have done what, in a moment, she has done through my mother."

He held his peace awhile. Never before had I seen so much fire and so little sunshine in Dr. John's blue eye, as just now.

"Lucy," he recommenced, "look well at my mother, and say, without fear or favour, in what light she now appears to you."

"As she always does,—an English, middle-class gentlewoman; well, though gravely dressed, habitually independent of pretence, constitutionally composed and cheerful."

"So she seems to me—bless her! The merry may laugh *with* mama, but the weak only will laugh *at* her. She shall not be ridiculed, with my consent at least; nor without my—my scorn—my antipathy—my——"

He stopped: and it was time—for he was getting excited—more it seemed than the occasion warranted. I did not then know that he had witnessed double cause for dissatisfaction with Miss Fanshawe. The glow of his complexion, the expansion of his nostril, the bold curve which disdain gave his well-cut under lip, showed him in a new and

striking phase. Yet the rare passion of the constitutionally suave and serene, is not a pleasant spectacle; nor did I like the sort of vindictive thrill which passed through his strong young frame.

“Do I frighten you, Lucy?” he asked.

“I cannot tell why you are so very angry.”

“For this reason,” he muttered in my ear: “Ginevra is neither a pure angel nor a pure-minded woman.”

“Nonsense! you exaggerate: she has no great harm in her.”

“Too much for me. *I* can see where *you* are blind. Now, dismiss the subject. Let me amuse myself by teasing mama: I will assert that she is flagging. Mama, pray rouse yourself.”

“John, I will certainly rouse you, if you are not better conducted. Will you and Lucy be silent, that I may hear the singing?”

They were then thundering in a chorus, under cover of which all the previous dialogue had taken place.

“*You* hear the singing, mama! Now, I will wager my studs—which are genuine—against your paste brooch ——”

“My paste brooch, Graham? Profane boy! you know that it is a stone of value.”

“Oh! that is one of your superstitions: you were cheated in the business.”

“I am cheated in fewer things than you imagine. How do you happen to be acquainted with young ladies of the court, John? I have observed two of them pay you no small attention during the last half hour.”

“I wish you would not observe them.”

“Why not? Because one of them satirically levels her eye-glass at me? She is a pretty, silly girl: but are you apprehensive that her titter will discomfit the old lady?”

“The sensible, admirable old lady! Mother, you are better to me than ten wives yet.”

“Don’t be demonstrative, John, or I shall faint, and you will have to carry me out; and if that burden were laid upon you, you would reverse your last speech, and exclaim, ‘Mother, ten wives could hardly be worse to me than you are!’”

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The concert over, the Lottery “au bénéfice des Pauvres” came next: the interval between was one

of general relaxation, and the pleasantest imaginable stir and commotion. The white flock was cleared from the platform; a busy throng of gentlemen crowded it instead, making arrangements for the drawing; and amongst these—the busiest of all—re-appeared that certain well-known form, not tall but active, alive with the energy and movement of three tall men. How M. Paul did work! How he issued directions, and at the same time, set his own shoulder to the wheel! Half-a-dozen assistants were at his beck to remove the pianos, &c.; no matter, he must add to their strength his own. The redundancy of his alertness was half-vexing, half-ludicrous: in my mind I both disapproved and derided most of this fuss. Yet, in the midst of prejudice and annoyance, I could not, while watching, avoid perceiving a certain not disagreeable naïveté in all he did and said; nor could I be blind to certain vigorous characteristics of his physiognomy, rendered conspicuous now by the contrast with a throng of tamer faces: the deep, intent keenness of his eye, the power of his forehead—pale, broad, and full—the mobility of his most flexible mouth. He lacked the calm of force, but its movement and its fire he signally possessed.



Meantime the whole hall was in a stir; most people rose and remained standing, for a change; some walked about, all talked and laughed. The crimson compartment presented a peculiarly animated scene. The long cloud of gentlemen, breaking into fragments, mixed with the rainbow line of ladies; two or three officer-like men approached the King and conversed with him. The Queen, leaving her chair, glided along the rank of young ladies, who all stood up as she passed; and to each in turn I saw her vouchsafe some token of kindness—a gracious word, look or smile. To the two pretty English girls, Lady Sara and Ginevra Fanshawe, she addressed several sentences; as she left them, both, and especially the latter, seemed to glow all over with gratification. They were afterwards accosted by several ladies, and a little circle of gentlemen gathered round them; amongst these—the nearest to Ginevra—stood the Count de Hamal.

“This room is stiflingly hot;” said Dr. Bretton, rising with sudden impatience. “Lucy—mother—will you come a moment to the fresh air?”

“Go with him Lucy;” said Mrs. Bretton. “I would rather keep my seat.”

Willingly would I have kept mine also, but

Graham's desire must take precedence of my own; I accompanied him.

We found the night-air keen; or at least, I did: he did not seem to feel it; but it was very still, and the star-sown sky spread cloudless. I was wrapped in a fur shawl. We took some turns on the pavement; in passing under a lamp, Graham encountered my eye.

"You look pensive, Lucy: is it on my account?"

"I was only fearing that you were grieved."

"Not at all: so be of good cheer—as I am. Whenever I die, Lucy, my persuasion is that it will not be of heart-complaint. I may be stung, I may seem to droop for a time, but no pain or malady of sentiment has yet gone through my whole system. You have always seen me cheerful at home?"

"Generally."

"I am glad she laughed at my mother. I would not give the old lady for a dozen beauties. That sneer did me all the good in the world. Thank you, Miss Fanshawe!" And he lifted his hat from his waved locks, and made a mock reverence.

"Yes," he said, "I thank her. She has made

me feel that nine parts in ten of my heart have always been sound as a bell, and the tenth bled from a mere puncture: a lancet-prick that will heal in a trice."

"You are angry just now, heated and indignant; you will think and feel differently to-morrow."

"*I* heated and indignant! You don't know me. On the contrary, the heat is gone: I am cool as the night—which, by the way, may be too cool for you. We will go back."

"Dr. John—this is a sudden change."

"Not it: or if it be, there are good reasons for it—two good reasons: I have told you one. But now let us re-enter."

We did not easily regain our seats; the lottery was begun, and all was excited confusion; crowds blocked the sort of corridor along which we had to pass: it was necessary to pause for a time. Happening to glance round—indeed I half fancied I heard my name pronounced—I saw quite near, the ubiquitous, the inevitable M. Paul. He was looking at me gravely and intently: at me, or rather, at my pink dress—sardonic comment on which gleamed in his eye. Now it was his habit to indulge in strictures on the dress, both of the teachers

and pupils, at Madame Beck's—a habit which the former, at least, held to be an offensive impertinence: as yet I had not suffered from it—my sombre daily attire not being calculated to attract notice. I was in no mood to permit any new encroachment to-night: rather than accept his banter, I would ignore his presence, and accordingly steadily turned my face to the sleeve of Dr. John's coat; finding in that same black sleeve a prospect more redolent of pleasure and comfort, more genial, more friendly, I thought, than was offered by the dark little Professor's unlovely visage. Dr. John seemed unconsciously to sanction the preference by looking down and saying in his kind voice,

“Ay, keep close to my side, Lucy: these crowding burghers are no respecters of persons.”

I could not, however, be true to myself. Yielding to some influence, mesmeric or otherwise—an influence unwelcome, displeasing, but effective—I again glanced round to see if M. Paul was gone. No, there he stood on the same spot, looking still, but with a changed eye; he had penetrated my thought and read my wish to shun him. The mocking but not ill-humoured gaze was turned to a swarthy frown, and when I bowed, with a view to

conciliation, I got only the stiffest and sternest of nods in return.

"Whom have you made angry, Lucy?" whispered Dr. Bretton, smiling. "Who is that savage-looking friend of yours?"

"One of the professors at Madame Beck's: a very cross little man."

"He looks mighty cross just now: what have you done to him? What is it all about? Ah, Lucy, Lucy! tell me the meaning of this."

"No mystery, I assure you. M. Emanuel is very exigent, and because I looked at your coat sleeve, instead of curtsying and dipping to him, he thinks I have failed in respect."

"The little ——" began Dr. John: I know not what more he would have added, for at that moment I was nearly thrown down amongst the feet of the crowd. M. Paul had rudely pushed past, and was elbowing his way with such utter disregard to the convenience and security to all round him, that a very uncomfortable pressure was the consequence.

"I think he is what he himself would call 'méchant,'" said Dr. Bretton. I thought so, too.

Slowly and with difficulty we made our way along the passage, and at last regained our seats. The drawing of the lottery lasted nearly an hour; it was an animating and amusing scene; and as we each held tickets, we shared in the alternations of hope and fear raised by each turn of the wheel. Two little girls, of five and six years old, drew the numbers; and the prizes were duly proclaimed from the platform. These prizes were numerous, though of small value. It so fell out, that Dr. John and I each gained one: mine was a cigar-case, his a lady's head-dress—a most airy sort of blue and silver turban, with a streamer of plumage on one side, like a light snowy cloud. He was excessively anxious to make an exchange; but I could not be brought to hear reason, and to this day I keep my cigar-case: it serves, when I look at it, to remind me of old times, and one happy evening.

Dr. John, for his part, held his turban at arm's length between his finger and thumb, and looked at it with a mixture of reverence and embarrassment highly provocative of laughter. The contemplation over, he was about coolly to deposit the delicate fabric on the ground between his feet; he seemed to have no shadow of an idea of the treat-

ment or stowage it ought to receive : if his mother had not come to the rescue, I think he would finally have crushed it under his arm like an opera-hat ; she restored it to the band-box whence it had issued.

Graham was quite cheerful all the evening, and his cheerfulness seemed natural and unforced. His demeanour, his look, is not easily described ; there was something in it peculiar, and, in its way, original. I read in it no common mastery of the passions, and a fund of deep and healthy strength which, without any exhausting effort, bore down Disappointment and extracted her fang. His manner now, reminded me of qualities I had noticed in him when professionally engaged amongst the poor, the guilty, and the suffering, in the Basse-Ville : he looked at once determined, enduring, and sweet-tempered. Who could help liking him ? *He* betrayed no weakness which harassed all your feelings with considerations as to how its faltering must be propped ; from *him* broke no irritability which startled calm and quenched mirth ; *his* lips let fall no caustic that burned to the bone ; *his* eye shot no morose shafts that went cold and rusty and venomous through your heart : beside him was rest and refuge —around him, fostering sunshine.

And yet he had neither forgiven nor forgotten Miss Fanshawe. Once angered, I doubt if Dr. Bretton were to be soon propitiated—once alienated, whether he were ever to be reclaimed. He looked at her more than once; not stealthily or humbly, but with a movement of hardy, open observation. De Hamal was now a fixture beside her; Mrs. Cholmondeley sat near, and they and she were wholly absorbed in the discourse, mirth, and excitement, with which the crimson seats were as much astir as any plebeian part of the hall. In the course of some apparently animated discussion, Ginevra once or twice lifted her hand and arm; a handsome bracelet gleamed upon the latter. I saw that its gleam flickered in Dr. John's eye—quicken- ing therein a derisive, ireful sparkle; he laughed:—

“ I think,” he said, “ I will lay my turban on my wonted altar of offerings; there, at any rate, it would be certain to find favour: no grisette has a more facile faculty of acceptance. Strange! for after all, I know she is a girl of family.”

“ But you don't know her education, Dr. John,” said I. “ Tossed about all her life from one foreign school to another, she may justly proffer the plea of ignorance in extenuation of most of her faults. And



then, from what she says, I believe her father and mother were brought up much as she has been brought up."

"I always understood she had no fortune; and once I had pleasure in the thought," said he.

"She tells me," I answered, "that they are poor at home; she always speaks quite candidly on such points: you never find her lying, as these foreigners will often lie. Her parents have a large family: they occupy such a station and possess such connections as, in their opinion, demand display; stringent necessity of circumstances and inherent thoughtlessness of disposition combined, have engendered reckless unscrupulousness as to how they obtain the means of sustaining a good appearance. This is the state of things, and the only state of things she has seen from childhood upwards."

"I believe it—and I thought to mould her to something better: but, Lucy, to speak the plain truth, I have felt a new thing to-night, in looking at her and De Hamal. I felt it before noticing the impertinence directed at my mother. I saw a look interchanged between them immediately after their entrance, which threw a most unwelcome light on my mind."

“How do you mean? You have long been aware of the flirtation they keep up?”

“Ay, flirtation! That might be an innocent girlish wile to lure on the true lover; but what I refer to was not flirtation: it was a look marking mutual and secret understanding—it was neither girlish nor innocent. No woman, were she as beautiful as Aphrodite, who could give or receive such a glance, shall ever be sought in marriage by me: I would rather wed a paysanne in a short petticoat and high cap—and be sure that she was honest.”

I could not help smiling. I felt sure he now exaggerated the case: Ginevra, I was certain, was honest enough, with all her giddiness. I told him so. He shook his head, and said he would not be the man to trust her with his honour.

“The only thing,” said I, “with which you may safely trust her. She would unscrupulously damage a husband’s purse and property, recklessly try his patience and temper: I don’t think she would breathe, or let another breathe, on his honour.”

“You are becoming her advocate,” said he. “Do you wish me to resume my old chains?”

“No: I am glad to see you free, and trust that free you will long remain. Yet be, at the same time, just.”

“ I am so : just as Rhadamanthus, Lucy. When once I am thoroughly estranged, I cannot help being severe. But look ! the King and Queen are rising. I like that Queen : she has a sweet countenance. Mama, too, is excessively tired ; we shall never get the old lady home if we stay longer.”

“ I tired, John ? ” cried Mrs. Bretton, looking at least as animated and as wide-awake as her son, “ I would undertake to sit you out yet : leave us both here till morning, and we should see which would look the most jaded by sunrise.”

“ I should not like to try the experiment ; for, in truth, mama, you are the most unfading of evergreens, and the freshest of matrons. It must then be on the plea of your son’s delicate nerves and fragile constitution that I found a petition for our speedy adjournment.”

“ Indolent young man ! You wish you were in bed, no doubt ; and I suppose you must be humoured. There is Lucy, too, looking quite done up. For shame, Lucy ! At your age, a week of evenings-out would not have made me a shade paler. Come away, both of you ; and you may laugh at the old lady as much as you please, but, for my part, I shall take charge of the band-box and turban.”

Which she did accordingly. I offered to relieve her, but was shaken off with kindly contempt : my godmother opined that I had enough to do to take care of myself. Not standing on ceremony now, in the midst of the gay " confusion worse confounded " succeeding to the King and Queen's departure, Mrs. Bretton preceded us, and promptly made us a lane through the crowd. Graham followed, apostrophizing his mother as the most flourishing grisette it had ever been his good fortune to see charged with carriage of a band-box ; he also desired me to mark her affection for the sky-blue turban, and announced his conviction that she intended one day to wear it.

The night was now very cold and very dark, but with little delay we found the carriage. Soon we were packed in it, as warm and as snug as at a fire-side ; and the drive home was, I think, still pleasanter than the drive to the concert. Pleasant it was, even though the coachman—having spent in the shop of a " marchand de vin " a portion of the time we passed at the concert—drove us along the dark and solitary chaussée, far past the turn leading down to La Terrasse ; we, who were occupied in talking and laughing, not noticing the aberration—

till at last, Mrs. Bretton intimated that though she had always thought the chateau a retired spot, she did know it was situated at the world's end, as she declared seemed now to be the case, for she believed we had been an hour and a half en route, and had not yet taken the turn down the avenue.

Then Graham looked out, and perceiving only dim-spread fields, with unfamiliar rows of pollards and limes ranged along their else invisible sunk-fences, began to conjecture how matters were, and calling a halt and descending, he mounted the box and took the reins himself. Thanks to him, we arrived safe at home about an hour and a half beyond our time.

Martha had not forgotten us ; a cheerful fire was burning, and a neat supper spread in the dining-room : we were glad of both. The winter dawn was actually breaking before we gained our chambers. I took off my pink dress and lace mantle with happier feelings than I had experienced in putting them on. Not all, perhaps, who had shone brightly arrayed at that concert could say the same ; for not all had been satisfied with friendship—with its calm comfort and modest hope.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## REACTION.

YET three days, and then I must go back to the Pensionnat. I almost numbered the moments of these days upon the clock; fain would I have retarded their flight; but they glided by while I watched them: they were already gone while I yet feared their departure.

"Lucy will not leave us to-day," said Mrs. Bretton, coaxingly, at breakfast; "she knows we can procure a second respite."

"I would not ask for one if I might have it for a word," said I. "I long to get the good-bye over, and to be settled in the Rue Fossette again. I must go this morning: I must go directly; my trunk is packed and corded."

It appeared, however, that my going depended upon Graham; he had said he would accompany

me, and it so fell out that he was engaged all day, and only returned home at dusk. Then ensued a little combat of words. Mrs. Bretton and her son pressed me to remain one night more. I could have cried, so irritated and eager was I to be gone. I longed to leave them as the criminal on the scaffold longs for the axe to descend: that is, I wished the pang over. How much I wished it, they could not tell. On these points, mine was a state of mind out of their experience.

It was dark when Dr. John handed me from the carriage at Madame Beck's door. The lamp above was lit; it rained a November drizzle, as it had rained all day: the lamplight gleamed on the wet pavement. Just such a night was it as that on which, not a year ago, I had first stopped at this very threshold; just similar was the scene. I remembered the very shapes of the paving-stones which I had noted with idle eye, while, with a thick-beating heart, I waited the unclosing of that door at which I stood—a solitary and a suppliant. On that night, too, I had briefly met him who now stood with me. Had I ever reminded him of that rencontre, or explained it? I had not, nor ever felt the inclination to do so: it was a pleasant

thought, laid by in my own mind, and best kept there.

Graham rung the bell. The door was instantly opened, for it was just that period of the evening when the half-boarders took their departure—consequently, Rosine was on the alert.

“Don’t come in,” said I to him; but he stepped a moment into the well-lighted vestibule. I had not wished him to see that “the water stood in my eyes,” for his was too kind a nature ever to be needlessly shown such signs of sorrow. He always wished to heal—to relieve—when, physician as he was, neither cure nor alleviation were, perhaps, in his power.

“Keep up your courage, Lucy. Think of my mother and myself as true friends. We will not forget you.”

“Nor will I forget you, Dr. John.”

My trunk was now brought in. We had shaken hands; he had turned to go, but he was not satisfied: he had not done or said enough to content his generous impulses.

“Lucy,”—stepping after me—“shall you feel very solitary here?”

“At first I shall.”



“ Well, my mother will soon call to see you ; and, meantime, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll write—just any cheerful nonsense that comes into my head—shall I ? ”

“ Good, gallant heart ! ” thought I to myself ; but I shook my head, smiling, and said, “ Never think of it : impose on yourself no such task. *You write to me !*—you’ll not have time.”

“ Oh ! I will find or make time. Good-bye ! ”

He was gone. The heavy door crashed to : the axe had fallen—the pang was experienced.

Allowing myself no time to think or feel—swallowing tears as if they had been wine—I passed to madame’s sitting-room to pay the necessary visit of ceremony and respect. She received me with perfectly well-acted cordiality—was even demonstrative, though brief, in her welcome. In ten minutes I was dismissed. From the *salle à manger* I proceeded to the refectory, where pupils and teachers were now assembled for evening study : again I had a welcome, and one not, I think, quite hollow. That over, I was free to repair to the dormitory.

“ And will Graham really write ? ” I questioned, as I sank tired on the edge of the bed.

Reason, coming stealthily up to me through the twilight of that long, dim chamber, whispered sedately,—

“He may write once. So kind is his nature, it may stimulate him for once to make the effort. But it *cannot* be continued—it *may* not be repeated. Great were that folly which should build on such a promise—insane that credulity which should mistake the transitory rain-pool, holding in its hollow one draught, for the perennial spring yielding the supply of seasons.”

I bent my head: I sat thinking an hour longer. Reason still whispered me, laying on my shoulder a withered hand, and frostily touching my ear with the chill blue lips of eld.

“If,” muttered she, “if he *should* write, what then? Do you meditate pleasure in replying? Ah, fool! I warn you! Brief be your answer. Hope no delight of heart—no indulgence of intellect: grant no expansion to feeling—give holiday to no single faculty: dally with no friendly exchange: foster no genial intercommunion. . . .”

“But I have talked to Graham and you did not chide,” I pleaded.

“No,” said she, “I needed not. Talk for you

is good discipline. You converse imperfectly. While you speak, there can be no oblivion of inferiority—no encouragement to delusion: pain, privation, penury stamp your language . . . ”

“ But,” I again broke in, “ where the bodily presence is weak and the speech contemptible, surely there cannot be error in making written language the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve? ”

Reason only answered, “ At your peril you cherish that idea, or suffer its influence to animate any writing of yours! ”

“ But if I feel, may I *never* express? ”

“ *Never!* ” declared Reason.

I groaned under her bitter sternness. Never—never—oh, hard word! This hag, this Reason, would not let me look up, or smile, or hope: she could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in, and broken-down. According to her, I was born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond. Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination—*her* soft, bright foe,

*our* sweet Help, our divine Hope. We shall and must break bounds at intervals, despite the terrible revenge that awaits our return. Reason is vindictive as a devil: for me, she was always envenomed as a step-mother. If I have obeyed her it has chiefly been with the obedience of fear, not of love. Long ago I should have died of her ill-usage: her stint, her chill, her barren board, her icy bed, her savage, ceaseless blows; but for that kinder Power who holds my secret and sworn allegiance. Often has Reason turned me out by night, in mid-winter, on cold snow, flinging for sustenance the gnawed bone dogs had forsaken: sternly has she vowed her stores held nothing more for me—harshly denied my right to ask better things. . . . Then, looking up, have I seen in the sky a head amidst circling stars, of which the midmost and the brightest lent a ray sympathetic and attent. A spirit, softer and better than Human Reason, has descended with quiet flight to the waste—bringing all round her a sphere of air borrowed of eternal summer; bringing perfume of flowers which cannot fade—fragrance of trees whose fruit is life; bringing breezes pure from a world whose day needs no sun to lighten it. My hunger has

this good angel appeased with food, sweet and strange, gathered amongst gleanings, garnering their dew-white harvest in the first fresh hour of a heavenly day ; tenderly has she assuaged the insufferable tears which weep away life itself—kindly given rest to deadly weariness—generously lent hope and impulse to paralyzed despair. Divine, compassionate, succourable influence ! When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at thy white and winged feet, beautiful on mountain or on plain. Temples have been reared to the Sun—altars dedicated to the Moon. Oh, greater glory ! To thee neither hands build, nor lips consecrate ; but hearts, through ages, are faithful to thy worship. A dwelling thou hast, too wide for walls, too high for dome—a temple whose floors are space—rites whose mysteries transpire in presence, to the kindling, the harmony of worlds !

Sovereign complete ! thou hadst, for endurance, thy great army of martyrs ; for achievement, thy chosen band of worthies. Deity unquestioned, thine essence foils decay !

This daughter of Heaven remembered me to-night ; she saw me weep and she came with com-

fort: "Sleep," she said. "Sleep, sweetly—I gild thy dreams!"

She kept her word, and watched me through a night's rest; but at dawn Reason relieved the guard. I awoke with a sort of start; the rain was dashing against the panes, and the wind uttering a peevish cry at intervals; the night-lamp was dying on the black circular stand in the middle of the dormitory: day had already broken. How I pity those whom mental pain stuns instead of rousing! This morning the pang of waking snatched me out of bed like a hand with a giant's gripe. How quickly I dressed in the cold of the raw dawn! How deeply I drank of the ice-cold water in my carafe! This was always my cordial, to which, like other dram-drinkers, I had eager recourse when unsettled by chagrin.

Ere long the bell rang its *réveillée* to the whole school. Being dressed, I descended alone to the refectory, where the stove was lit and the air was warm; through the rest of the house it was cold, with the nipping severity of a continental winter: though now but the beginning of November, a north wind had thus early brought a wintry blight over Europe. I remember the black stoves pleased me little when I first came; but now I began to associate

with them a sense of comfort, and liked them, as in England, we like a fireside.

Sitting down before this dark comforter, I presently fell into a deep argument with myself on life and its chances, on destiny and her decrees. My mind, calmer and stronger now than last night, made for itself some imperious rules, prohibiting under deadly penalties all weak retrospect of happiness past; commanding a patient journeying through the wilderness of the present, enjoining a reliance on faith—a watching of the cloud and pillar which subdue while they guide, and awe while they illumine—hushing the impulse to fond idolatry, checking the longing out-look for a far-off promised land whose rivers are, perhaps, never to be reached save in dying dreams, whose sweet pastures are to be viewed but from the desolate and sepulchral summit of a Nebo.

By degrees, a composite feeling of blended strength and pain wound itself wirily round my heart, sustained, or at least restrained, its throbbings, and made me fit for the day's work. I lifted my head.

As I said before, I was sitting near the stove, let into the wall beneath the refectory and the carré, and thus sufficing to heat both apartments. Piercing

the same wall, and close beside the stove, was a window, looking also into the carré ; as I looked up a cap-tassel, a brow, two eyes filled a pane of that window ; the fixed gaze of those two eyes hit right against my own glance : they were watching me. I had not till that moment known that tears were on my cheek, but I felt them now.

This was a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine. And this new, this out-door, this male spy, what business had brought him to the premises at this unwonted hour ? What possible right had he to intrude on me thus ? No other professor would have dared to cross the carré before the class-bell rang. M. Emanuel took no account of hours nor of claims : there was some book of reference in the first-class library which he had occasion to consult ; he had come to seek it : on his way he passed the refectory. It was very much his habit to wear eyes before, behind, and on each side of him : he had seen me through the little window—he now opened the refectory door, and there he stood.

“ Mademoiselle, vous êtes triste.”

“ Monsieur, j'en ai bien le droit.”



“ Vous êtes malade de cœur et d’humeur,” he pursued. “ You are at once mournful and mutinous. I see on your cheek two tears which I know are hot as two sparks, and salt as two crystals of the sea. While I speak you eye me strangely. Shall I tell you of what I am reminded while watching you ? ”

“ Monsieur, I shall be called away to prayers shortly ; my time for conversation is very scant and brief at this hour—excuse—”

“ I excuse everything,” he interrupted ; “ my mood is so meek, neither rebuff nor, perhaps, insult could ruffle it. You remind me, then, of a young she wild creature, new caught, untamed, viewing with a mixture of fire and fear the first entrance of the breaker-in.”

Unwarrantable accost !—rash and rude if addressed to a pupil ; to a teacher inadmissible. He thought to provoke a warm reply ; I had seen him vex the passionate to explosion before now. In me his malice should find no gratification ; I sat silent.

“ You look,” said he, “ like one who would snatch at a draught of sweet poison, and spurn wholesome bitters with disgust.”

“ Indeed, I never liked bitters ; nor do I believe

them wholesome. And to whatever is sweet, be it poison or food, you cannot, at least, deny its own delicious quality—sweetness. Better, perhaps, to die quickly a pleasant death, than drag on long a charmless life.”

“Yet,” said he, “you should take your bitter dose duly and daily, if I had the power to administer it; and, as to the well-beloved poison, I would, perhaps, break the very cup which held it.”

I sharply turned my head away, partly because his presence utterly displeased me, and partly because I wished to shun questions: lest, in my present mood, the effort of answering should overmaster self-command.

“Come,” said he, more softly, “tell me the truth—you grieve at being parted from friends—is it not so?”

The insinuating softness was not more acceptable than the inquisitorial curiosity. I was silent. He came into the room, sat down on the bench about two yards from me, and persevered long, and, for him, patiently, in attempts to draw me into conversation—attempts necessarily unavailing, because I *could* not talk. At last I entreated to be let alone. In uttering the request, my voice faltered, my head

sank on my arms and the table. I wept bitterly, though quietly. He sat a while longer. I did not look up nor speak, till the closing door and his retreating step told me that he was gone. These tears proved a relief.

I had time to bathe my eyes before breakfast, and I suppose I appeared at that meal as serene as any other person: not, however, quite as jocund-looking as the young lady who placed herself in the seat opposite mine, fixed on me a pair of somewhat small eyes twinkling gleefully, and frankly stretched across the table a white hand to be shaken. Miss Fanshawe's travels, gaieties, and flirtations agreed with her mightily; she had become quite plump, her cheeks looked as round as apples. I had seen her last in elegant evening attire. I don't know that she looked less charming now in her school-dress, a kind of careless peignoir of a dark-blue material, dimly and dingily plaided with black. I even think this dusky wrapper gave her charms a triumph; enhancing by contrast the fairness of her skin, the freshness of her bloom, the golden beauty of her tresses.

"I am glad you are come back, Timon," said she. Timon was one of her dozen names for me.

“ You don’t know how often I have wanted you in this dismal hole.”

“ Oh ! have you ? Then, of course, if you wanted me, you have something for me to do : stockings to mend, perhaps ? ” I never gave Ginevra a minute’s or a farthing’s credit for disinterestedness.”

“ Crabbed and crusty as ever ! ” said she. “ I expected as much : it would not be you if you did not snub one. But now, come, grandmother, I hope you like coffee as much, and pistolets as little as ever : are you disposed to barter ? ”

“ Take your own way.”

This way consisted in a habit she had of making me convenient. She did not like the morning cup of coffee ; its school brewage not being strong or sweet enough to suit her palate ; and she had an excellent appetite, like any other healthy school-girl, for the morning pistolets or rolls, which were new-baked and very good, and of which a certain allowance was served to each. This allowance being more than I needed, I gave half to Ginevra ; never varying in my preference, though many others used to covet the superfluity ; and she in return would sometimes give me a portion of her coffee. This morning I

was glad of the draught; hunger I had none, and with thirst I was parched. I don't know why I choose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking-vessel, as sometimes happened—for instance, when we took a long walk into the country, and halted for refreshment at a farm—I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather liked to let her take the lion's share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk: so it was, however, and she knew it; and, therefore, while we wrangled daily, we were never alienated.

After breakfast my custom was to withdraw to the first classe, and sit and read, or think (oftenest the latter) there alone, till the nine o'clock bell threw open all doors, admitted the gathered rush of externes and demi-pensionnaires, and gave the signal for entrance on that bustle and business to which, till five p. m., there was no relax.

I was just seated this morning, when a tap came to the door.

“Pardon, mademoiselle,” said a pensionnaire, entering gently; and having taken from her desk some necessary book or paper, she withdrew on tip-

toe, murmuring, as she passed me, "*Que mademoiselle est appliquée!*"

*Appliquée*, indeed! The means of application were spread before me, but I was doing nothing; and had done nothing, and meant to do nothing. Thus does the world give us credit for merits we have not. Madame Beck herself deemed me a regular *bas-bleu*, and often and solemnly used to warn me not to study too much, lest "the blood should all go to my head." Indeed, everybody in the Rue Fossette held a superstition that "*Mees Lucie*" was learned; with the notable exception of M. Emanuel: who, by means peculiar to himself, and quite inscrutable to me, had obtained a not inaccurate inkling of my real qualifications, and used to take quiet opportunities of chuckling in my ear his malign glee over their scant measure. For my part, I never troubled myself about this penury. I dearly like to think my own thoughts; I had great pleasure in reading a few books, but not many: preferring always those in whose style or sentiment the writer's individual nature was plainly stamped; flagging inevitably over characterless books, however clever and meritorious: perceiving well that, as far as my own

mind was concerned, God had limited its powers and its action—thankful, I trust, for the gift bestowed, but unambitious of higher endowments, not restlessly eager after higher culture.

The polite pupil was scarcely gone, when, unceremoniously, without tap, in burst a second intruder. Had I been blind I should have known who this was. A constitutional reserve of manner had by this time told with wholesome and, for me, commodious effect, on the manners of my co-inmates; rarely did I now suffer from rude or intrusive treatment. When I first came, it would happen once and again that a blunt German would clap me on the shoulder, and ask me to run a race; or a riotous Labassecourienne seize me by the arm and drag me towards the play-ground: urgent proposals to take a swing at the “Pas de Géant,” or to join in a certain romping hide-and-seek game called “Un, deux, trois,” were formerly also of hourly occurrence; but all these little attentions had ceased some time ago—ceased, too, without my finding it necessary to be at the trouble of point-blank cutting them short. I had now no familiar demonstration to dread or endure, save from one quarter; and as that was English I could

bear it. Ginevra Fanshawe made no scruple of—at times—catching me as I was crossing the carré, whirling me round in a compulsory waltz, and heartily enjoying the mental and physical discomfiture her proceeding induced. Ginevra Fanshawe it was who now broke in upon my “learned leisure.” She carried a huge music-book under her arm.

“Go to your practising,” said I to her at once: “away with you to the little salon!”

“Not till I have had a talk with you, chère amie. I know where you have been spending your vacation, and how you have commenced sacrificing to the graces, and enjoying life like any other belle. I saw you at the concert the other night, dressed, actually, like anybody else. Who is your tail-leuse?”

“Tittle-tattle: how prettily it begins! My tail-leuse!—a fiddlestick! Come, sheer off, Ginevra. I really don’t want your company.”

“But when I want yours so much, ange farouche, what does a little reluctance on your part signify? Dieu merci! we know how to manœuvre with our gifted compatriote—the learned ‘ourse Britannique.’ And so, Ourson, you know Isidore?”

“I know John Bretton.”



“Oh, hush!” (putting her fingers in her ears) “you crack my tympanums with your rude Anglicisms. But, how is our well-beloved John? Do tell me about him. The poor man must be in a sad way. What did he say to my behaviour the other night? Wasn’t I cruel?”

“Do you think I noticed you?”

“It was a delightful evening. Oh, that divine de Hamal! And then to watch the other sulking and dying in the distance; and the old lady—my future mama-in-law! But I am afraid I and Lady Sara were a little rude in quizzing her.”

“Lady Sara never quizzed her at all; and for what *you* did, don’t make yourself in the least uneasy: Mrs. Bretton will survive *your* sneer.”

“She may: old ladies are tough; but that poor son of hers! Do tell me what he said: I saw he was terribly cut up.”

“He said you looked as if, at heart, you were already Madame de Hamal.”

“Did he?” she cried, with delight. “He noticed that? How charming! I thought he would be mad with jealousy.”

“Ginevra, have you seriously done with Dr. Bretton? Do you want him to give you up?”

“Oh! you know he *can't* do that: but wasn't he mad?”

“Quite mad,” I assented; “as mad as a March hare.”

“Well, and how *ever* did you get him home?”

“How *ever*, indeed! Have you no pity on his poor mother and me? Fancy us holding him tight down in the carriage, and he raving between us, fit to drive everybody delirious. The very coachman went wrong, somehow, and we lost our way.”

“You don't say so? You are laughing at me. Now, Lucy Snowe——”

“I assure you it is fact—and fact, also, that Dr. Bretton would *not* stay in the carriage: he broke from us, and *would* ride outside.”

“And afterwards?”

“Afterwards—when we *did* reach home—the scene transcends description.”

“Oh, but describe it—you know it is such fun!”

“Fun for *you*, Miss Fanshawe; but” (with stern gravity) “you know the proverb—‘What is sport to one may be death to another.’”

“Go on, there's a darling Timon.”

“Conscientiously, I cannot, unless you assure me you have some heart.”

"I have—such an immensity, you don't know!"

"Good! In that case, you will be able to conceive Dr. Graham Bretton rejecting his supper in the first instance—the chicken, the sweet-bread prepared for his refreshment, left on the table untouched. Then—but it is of no use dwelling at length on harrowing details. Suffice it to say, that never, in the most stormy fits and moments of his infancy, had his mother such work to tuck the sheets about him as she had that night."

"He wouldn't lie still?"

"He wouldn't lie still: there it was. The sheets might be tucked in, but the thing was to keep them tucked in."

"And what did he say?"

"Say! Can't you imagine him demanding his divine Ginevra, anathematizing that demon, De Hamal—raving about golden locks, blue eyes, white arms, glittering bracelets?"

"No, did he? He saw the bracelet?"

"Saw the bracelet? Yes, as plain as I saw it: and, perhaps, for the first time, he saw also the brand-mark with which its pressure has circled your arm. Ginevra," (rising, and changing my tone) "come, we will have an end of this. Go

away to your practising." And I opened the door.

"But you've not told me all."

"You had better not wait until I *do* tell you all. Such extra communicativeness could give you no pleasure. March!"

"Cross thing!" said she; but she obeyed: and, indeed, the first classe was my territory, and she could not there legally resist a notice of quittance from me.

Yet, to speak the truth, never had I been less dissatisfied with her than I was then. There was pleasure in thinking of the contrast between the reality and my description—to remember Dr. John enjoying the drive home, eating his supper with relish, and retiring to rest with Christian composure. It was only when I saw him really unhappy that I felt really vexed with the fair, frail cause of his suffering.

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A fortnight passed; I was getting once more inured to the harness of school, and lapsing from the passionate pain of change to the palsy of custom.

One afternoon in crossing the carré, on my way to the first class, where I was expected to assist at a lesson of "style and literature," I saw, standing by one of the long and large windows, Rosine, the portress. Her attitude, as usual, was quite nonchalante. She always "stood at ease;" one of her hands rested in her apron-pocket, the other, at this moment, held to her eyes a letter, whereof Mademoiselle coolly perused the address, and deliberately studied the seal.

A letter! The shape of a letter similar to that had haunted my brain in its very core for seven days past. I had dreamed of a letter last night. Strong magnetism drew me to that letter now; yet, whether I should have ventured to demand of Rosine so much as a glance at that white envelope, with the spot of red wax in the middle, I know not. No; I think I should have sneaked past in terror of a rebuff from Disappointment: my heart throbbed now as if I already heard the tramp of her approach. Nervous mistake! It was the rapid step of the Professor of Literature measuring the corridor. I fled before him. Could I but be seated quietly at my desk before his arrival, with the class under my orders all in disciplined readiness, he would, perhaps,

exempt me from notice; but, if caught lingering in the carré, I should be sure to come in for a special harangue. I had time to get seated, to enforce perfect silence, to take out my work, and to commence it amidst the profoundest and best trained hush, ere M. Emanuel entered with his vehement burst of latch and panel, and his deep, redundant bow, prophetic of choler.

As usual he broke upon us like a clap of thunder; but instead of flashing lightning-wise from the door to the estrade, his career halted midway at my desk. Setting his face towards me and the window, his back to the pupils and the room, he gave me a look—such a look as might have licensed me to stand straight up and demand what he meant—a look of scowling distrust.

“Voilà! pour vous,” said he, drawing his hand from his waistcoat, and placing on my desk a letter—the very letter I had seen in Rosine’s hand—the letter whose face of enamelled white and single Cyclop’s-eye of vermilion-red had printed themselves so clear and perfect on the retina of an inward vision. I knew it, I felt it to be the letter of my hope, the fruition of my wish, the release from my doubt, the ransom from my terror. This letter M.

Paul, with his unwarrantably interfering habits, had taken from the portress, and now delivered it himself.

I might have been angry, but had not a second for the sensation. Yes: I held in my hand not a slight note, but an envelope, which must, at least, contain a sheet: it felt, not flimsy, but firm, substantial, satisfying. And here was the direction, "Miss Lucy Snowe," in a clean, clear, equal, decided hand; and here was the seal, round, full, deftly dropped by untremulous fingers, stamped with the well-cut impress of initials, "J. G. B." I experienced a happy feeling—a glad emotion which went warm to my heart, and ran lively through all my veins. For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live; not a mess of that manna I drearily eulogized awhile ago—which, indeed, at first melts on the lips with an unspeakable and preternatural sweetness, but which, in the end, our souls full surely loathe; longing deliriously for natural and earth-grown food, wildly praying Heaven's Spirits to reclaim their own spirit-dew and essence—an aliment

divine, but for mortals deadly. It was neither sweet hail, nor small coriander-seed—neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining. It was what the old dying patriarch demanded of his son Esau, promising him in requital the blessing of his last breath. It was a godsend; and I inwardly thanked the God who had vouchsafed it. Outwardly I only thanked man, crying, “Thank you, thank you, Monsieur!”

Monsieur curled his lip, gave me a vicious glance of the eye, and strode to his estrade. M. Paul was not at all a good little man, though he had good points.

Did I read my letter there and then? Did I consume the venison at once and with haste, as if Esau’s shaft flew every day?

I knew better. The cover with its address; the seal, with its three clear letters, was bounty and abundance for the present. I stole from the room, I procured the key of the great dormitory which was kept locked by day. I went to my bureau; with a sort of haste and trembling lest Madame should



creep up-stairs and spy me, I opened a drawer, unlocked a box, and took out a case, and—having feasted my eyes with one more look, and approached the seal, with a mixture of awe and shame and delight, to my lips—I folded the untasted treasure, yet all fair and inviolate, in silver paper, committed it to the case, shut up box and drawer, reclosed, relocked the dormitory, and returned to class, feeling as if fairy tales were true and fairy gifts no dream. Strange, sweet insanity ! And this letter, the source of my joy, I had not yet read : did not yet know the number of its lines.

When I re-entered the school-room, behold M. Paul raging like a pestilence ! Some pupil had not spoken audibly or distinctly enough to suit his ear and taste, and now she and others were weeping, and he was raving from his estrade almost livid. Curious to mention, as I appeared, he fell on me.

“ Was I the mistress of these girls ? Did I profess to teach them the conduct befitting ladies ?—and did I permit and, he doubted not, encourage them to strangle their mother-tongue in their throats, to mince and mash it between their teeth, as if they had some base cause to be ashamed of the words they uttered ? Was this

modesty? He knew better. It was a vile pseudo sentiment—the offspring or the forerunner of evil. Rather than submit to this mopping and mowing, this mincing and grimacing, this grinding of a noble tongue, this general affectation and sickening stubbornness of the pupils of the first class, he would throw them up for a set of insupportable petites maitresses, and confine himself to teaching the A B C to the babies of the third division.”

What could I say to all this? Really nothing; and I hoped he would allow me to be silent. The storm recommenced.

“Every answer to his queries was then refused? It seemed to be considered in *that* place—that conceited boudoir of a first class, with its pretentious book-cases, its green-baized desks, its rubbish of flower-stands, its trash of framed pictures and maps, and its foreign surveillante, forsooth!—it seemed to be the fashion to think *there* that the Professor of Literature was not worthy of a reply! These were new ideas; imported, he did not doubt, straight from ‘la Grande Bretagne’: they savoured of island insolence and arrogance.”

Lull the second—the girls, not one of whom

was ever known to weep a tear for the rebukes of any other master, now all melting like snow-statues before the intemperate heat of M. Emanuel: I, not yet much shaken, sitting down, and venturing to resume my work.

Something—either in my continued silence or in the movement of my hand, stitching—transported M. Emanuel beyond the last boundary of patience; he actually sprung from his estrade. The stove stood near my desk, and he attacked it; the little iron door was nearly dashed from its hinges, the fuel was made to fly.

“ Est-ce que vous avez l'intention de m'insulter ? ” said he to me, in a low, furious voice, as he thus outraged, under pretence of arranging, the fire.

It was time to soothe him a little if possible.

“ Mais, monsieur, ” said I, “ I would not insult you for the world. I remember too well that you once said we should be friends. ”

I did not intend my voice to falter, but it did: more, I think, through the agitation of late delight than in any spasm of present fear. Still there certainly was something in M. Paul's anger—a kind of passion of emotion—that specially tended to

draw tears. I was not unhappy, nor much afraid, yet I wept.

“Allons, allons!” said he presently, looking round and seeing the deluge universal. “Decidedly I am a monster and a ruffian. I have only one pocket-handkerchief,” he added, “but if I had twenty, I would offer you each one. Your teacher shall be your representative. Here, Miss Lucy.”

And he took forth and held out to me a clean silk handkerchief. Now a person who did not know M. Paul, who was unused to him and his impulses, would naturally have bungled at this offer—declined accepting the same—etcetera. But I too plainly felt this would never do: the slightest hesitation would have been fatal to the incipient treaty of peace. I rose and met the handkerchief half-way, received it with decorum, wiped therewith my eyes, and, resuming my seat, and retaining the flag of truce in my hand and on my lap, took especial care during the remainder of the lesson to touch neither needle nor thimble, scissors nor muslin. Many a jealous glance did M. Paul cast at these implements; he hated them mortally, considering sewing a source of distraction from the

attention due to himself. A very eloquent lesson he gave, and very kind and friendly was he to the close. Ere he had done, the clouds were dispersed and the sun shining out—tears were exchanged for smiles.

In quitting the room he paused once more at my desk.

“And your letter?” said he, this time not quite fiercely.

“I have not yet read it, monsieur.”

“Ah! it is too good to read at once: you save it, as, when I was a boy, I used to save a peach whose bloom was very ripe?”

The guess came so near the truth, I could not prevent a suddenly-rising warmth in my face from revealing as much.

“You promise yourself a pleasant moment,” said he, “in reading that letter; you will open it when alone—*n’est ce pas?* Ah! a smile answers. Well, well! one should not be too harsh; ‘*la jeunesse n’a qu’un temps.*’”

“Monsieur, monsieur!” I cried or rather whispered after him, as he turned to go, “do not leave me under a mistake. This is merely a friend’s letter. Without reading it, I can vouch for that.”

“Je conçois, je conçois: on sait ce que c'est qu'un ami. Bon-jour, mademoiselle!”

“But, monsieur, here is your handkerchief.”

“Keep it, keep it, till the letter is read, then bring it me; I shall read the billet's tenor in your eyes.”

When he was gone, the pupils having already poured out of the school-room into the *berceau*, and thence into the garden and court to take their customary recreation before the five o'clock dinner, I stood a moment thinking, and absently twisting the handkerchief round my arm. For some reason—gladdened, I think, by a sudden return of the golden glimmer of childhood, roused by an unwonted renewal of its buoyancy, made merry by the liberty of the closing hour, and, above all, solaced at heart by the joyous consciousness of that treasure in the case, box, drawer up-stairs,—I fell to playing with the handkerchief as if it were a ball, casting it into the air and catching it as it fell. The game was stopped by another hand than mine—a hand emerging from a *paletôt*-sleeve and stretched over my shoulder; it caught the extemporized plaything and bore it away with these sullen words:

“ Je vois bien que vous vous moquez de moi et de mes effets.”

Really that little man was dreadful: a mere sprite of caprice and ubiquity: one never knew either his whim or his whereabouts.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE LETTER.

WHEN all was still in the house ; when dinner was over and the noisy recreation-hour past ; when darkness had set in, and the quiet lamp of study was lit in the refectory ; when the externes were gone home, the clashing door and clamorous bell hushed for the evening ; when Madame was safely settled in the *salle à manger* in company with her mother and some friends ; I then glided to the kitchen, begged a bougie for one half hour for a particular occasion, found acceptance of my petition at the hands of my friend Goton, who answered “ *Mais certainement, chou-chou, vous en aurez deux, si vous voulez.*” And, light in hand, I mounted noiseless to the dormitory.

Great was my *chagrin* to find in that apartment a pupil gone to bed indisposed,—greater when I



recognized amid the muslin night-cap borders, the "figure chiffonée" of Mistress Ginevra Fanshawe; supine at this moment, it is true—but, certain to wake and overwhelm me with chatter when the interruption would be least acceptable: indeed, as I watched her, a slight twinkling of the eyelids warned me that the present appearance of repose might be but a ruse, assumed to cover sly vigilance over "Timon's" movements: she was not to be trusted. And I had so wished to be alone, just to read my precious letter in peace.

Well, I must go to the classes. Having sought and found my prize in its casket, I descended. Ill-luck pursued me. The classes were undergoing sweeping and purification by candle-light, according to hebdomadal custom: benches were piled on desks, the air was dim with dust, damp coffee-grounds (used by Labassecourien housemaids instead of tea-leaves) darkened the floor; all was hopeless confusion. Baffled, but not beaten, I withdrew, bent as resolutely as ever on finding solitude *somewhere*.

Taking a key whereof I knew the repository, I mounted three staircases in succession, reached a dark, narrow, silent landing, opened a worm-eaten door, and dived into the deep, black, cold garret.

Here none would follow me—none interrupt—not Madame herself. I shut the garret-door; I placed my light on a doddered and mouldy chest of drawers; I put on a shawl, for the air was ice-cold; I took my letter, trembling with sweet impatience; I broke its seal.

“Will it be long—will it be short?” thought I, passing my hand across my eyes to dissipate the silvery dimness of a suave, south wind shower.

It was long.

“Will it be cool?—will it be kind?”

It was kind.

To my checked, bridled, disciplined expectation, it seemed very kind; to my longing and famished thought it seemed, perhaps, kinder than it was.

So little had I hoped, so much had I feared; there was a fullness of delight in this taste of fruition—such, perhaps, as many a human being passes through life without ever knowing. The poor English teacher in the frosty garret, reading by a dim candle guttering in the wintry air, a letter simply good-natured—nothing more: though that good-nature then seemed to me god-like—was happier than most queens in palaces.

Of course, happiness of such shallow origin could

but be brief; yet, while it lasted, it was genuine and exquisite: a bubble—but a sweet bubble—of real honey-dew. Dr. John had written to me at length; he had written to me with pleasure; he had written in benignant mood, dwelling with sunny satisfaction on scenes that had passed before his eyes and mine,—on places we had visited together—on conversations we had held—on all the little subject-matter, in short, of the last few halcyon weeks. But the cordial core of the delight was, a conviction the blithe, genial language generously imparted, that it had been poured out—not merely to content *me*—but to gratify *himself*. A gratification he might never more desire, never more seek—an hypothesis in every point of view approaching the certain; but *that* concerned the future. This present moment had no pain, no blot, no want; full, pure, perfect, it deeply blessed me. A passing seraph seemed to have rested beside me, leaned towards my heart, and reposed on its throb a softening, cooling, healing, hallowing wing. Dr. John, you pained me afterwards: forgiven be every ill—freely forgiven—for the sake of that one dear remembered good!

Are there wicked things, not human, which envy

human bliss? Are there evil influences haunting the air, and poisoning it for man? What was near me? . . .

Something in that vast solitary garret sounded strangely. Most surely and certainly I heard, as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks. I turned: my light was dim; the room was long—but, as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white.

Say what you will, reader—tell me I was nervous, or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed: this I vow—I saw there—in that room—on that night—an image like—a NUN.

I cried out; I sickened. Had the shape approached me I might have swooned. It receded: I made for the door. How I descended all the stairs I know not. By instinct I shunned the refectory, and shaped my course to Madame's sitting-room: I burst in. I said—

“There is something in the grenier: I have been

there: I saw something. Go and look at it, all of you!"

I said, "All of you;" for the room seemed to me full of people, though, in truth, there were but four present: Madame Beck; her mother, Madame Kint, who was out of health, and now staying with her on a visit; her brother M. Victor Kint, and another gentleman: who, when I entered the room, was conversing with the old lady, and had his back towards the door.

My mortal fear and faintness must have made me deadly pale. I felt cold and shaking. They all rose in consternation; they surrounded me. I urged them to go to the grenier; the sight of the gentlemen did me good and gave me courage: it seemed as if there was some help and hope, with men at hand. I turned to the door, beckoning them to follow. They wanted to stop me; but I said they must come this way: they must see what I had seen—something strange, standing in the middle of the garret. And, now, I remembered my letter, left on the drawers with the light. This precious letter! Flesh or spirit must be defied for its sake. I flew up stairs, hastening the faster as I knew I was followed: they were obliged to come.

Lo! When I reached the garret-door, all within was dark as a pit: the light was out. Happily, some one—Madame, I think, with her usual calm sense—had brought a lamp from the room; speedily, therefore, as they came up, a ray pierced the opaque blackness. There stood the bougie quenched on the drawers; but where was the letter? And I looked for *that* now, and not for the nun.

“My letter! my letter!” I panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly. Cruel, cruel doom! To have my bit of comfort preternaturally snatched from me, ere I had well tasted its virtue!

I don’t know what the others were doing; I could not watch them: they asked me questions I did not answer; they ransacked all corners; they prattled about this and that, disarrangement of cloaks, a breach or crack in the sky-light—I know not what. “Something or somebody has been here,” was sagely averred.

“Oh! they have taken my letter!” cried the grovelling, groping, monomaniac.

“What letter, Lucy? My dear girl, what letter?” asked a known voice in my ear. Could I believe that ear? No: and I looked up. Could I trust

my eyes? Had I recognized the tone? Did I now look on the face of the writer of that very letter? Was this gentleman near me in this dim garret, John Graham—Dr. Bretton himself?

Yes: it was. He had been called in that very evening to prescribe for some access of illness in old Madame Kint; he was the second gentleman present in the *salle à manger* when I entered.

“ Was it *my* letter, Lucy ? ”

“ Your own: yours—the letter you wrote to me I had come here to read it quietly. I could not find another spot where it was possible to have it to myself. I had saved it all day—never opened it till this evening: it was scarcely glanced over: I *cannot bear* to lose it. Oh, my letter ! ”

“ Hush! don’t cry and distress yourself so cruelly. What is it worth? Hush! Come out of this cold room; they are going to send for the police now to examine further: we need not stay here—come, we will go down.”

A warm hand, taking my cold fingers, led me down to a room where there was a fire. Dr. John and I sat before the stove. He talked to me and soothed me with unutterable goodness, promising me twenty letters for the one lost. If there are

words and wrongs like knives, whose deep-inflicted lacerations never heal—cutting injuries and insults of serrated and poison-dripping edge—so, too, there are consolations of tone too fine for the ear not fondly and for ever to retain their echo: caressing kindnesses—loved, lingered over through a whole life, recalled with unfaded tenderness, and answering the call with undimmed shine, out of that raven cloud foreshadowing Death himself. I have been told since, that Dr. Bretton was not so nearly perfect as I thought him: that his actual character lacked the depth, height, compass, and endurance it possessed in my creed. I don't know: he was as good to me as the well is to the parched wayfarer—as the sun to the shivering jail-bird. I remember him heroic. Heroic at this moment will I hold him to be.

He asked me, smiling, why I cared for his letter so very much. I thought, but did not say, that I prized it like the blood in my veins. I only answered that I had so few letters to care for.

“I am sure you did not read it,” said he; “or you would think nothing of it!”

“I read it, but only once. I want to read it



again. I am sorry it is lost." And I could not help weeping afresh.

"Lucy, Lucy, my poor little god-sister (if there be such a relationship), here—*here* is your letter. Why is it not better worth such tears, and such tenderly exaggerating faith!"

Curious, characteristic manœuvre! His quick eye had seen the letter on the floor where I sought it; his hand, as quick, had snatched it up. He had hidden it in his waistcoat pocket. If my trouble had wrought with a whit less stress and reality, I doubt whether he would ever have acknowledged or restored it. Tears of temperature one degree cooler than those I shed would only have amused Dr. John.

Pleasure at regaining made me forget merited reproach for the teasing torment; my joy was great; it could not be concealed: yet I think it broke out more in countenance than language. I said little.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked Dr. John.

I replied that I was—satisfied and happy.

"Well then," he proceeded, "how do you feel physically? Are you growing calmer? Not much; for you tremble like a leaf still."

It seemed to me, however, that I was sufficiently calm: at least I felt no longer terrified. I expressed myself composed.

"You are able, consequently, to tell me what you saw? Your account was quite vague, do you know? You looked white as the wall; but you only spoke of 'something,' not defining *what*. Was it a man? Was it an animal? *What* was it?"

"I never will tell exactly what I saw," said I, "unless some one else sees it too, and then I will give corroborative testimony; but otherwise, I shall be discredited and accused of dreaming."

"Tell me," said Dr. Bretton; "I will hear it in my professional character: I look on you now from a professional point of view, and I read, perhaps, all you would conceal—in your eye, which is curiously vivid and restless; in your cheek, which the blood has forsaken; in your hand, which you cannot steady. Come, Lucy, speak and tell me."

"You would laugh——?"

"If you don't tell me you shall have no more letters."

"You are laughing now."

"I will again take away that single epistle: being mine, I think I have a right to reclaim it."

I felt raillery in his words : it made me grave and quiet ; but I folded up the letter and covered it from sight.

“ You may hide it, but I can possess it any moment I choose. You don’t know my skill in sleight of hand : I might practise as a conjuror if I liked. Mama says sometimes, too, that I have an harmonizing property of tongue and eye ; but you never saw that in me—did you Lucy ? ”

“ Indeed—indeed—when you were a mere boy I used to see both : far more then than now—for now you are strong, and strength dispenses with subtlety. But still, Dr. John, you have what they call in this country ‘ un air fin,’ that nobody can mistake. Madame Beck saw it, and——”

“ And liked it,” said he, laughing, “ because she has it herself. But, Lucy, give me that letter—you don’t really care for it.”

To this provocative speech I made no answer. Graham in mirthful mood must not be humoured too far. Just now there was a new sort of smile playing about his lips—very sweet, but it grieved me somehow—a new sort of light sparkling in his

eyes : not hostile, but not reassuring. I rose to go—I bid him good night a little sadly.

His sensitiveness—that peculiar, apprehensive, detective faculty of his—felt in a moment the unspoken complaint—the scarce-thought reproach. He asked quietly if I was offended. I shook my head as implying a negative.

“Permit me, then, to speak a little seriously to you before you go. You are in a highly nervous state. I feel sure from what is apparent in your look and manner, however well-controlled, that whilst alone this evening in that dismal, perishing sepulchral garret—that dungeon under the leads, smelling of damp and mould, rank with pthisis and catarrh: a place you never ought to enter—that you saw, or *thought* you saw, some appearance peculiarly calculated to impress the imagination. I know you *are* not, nor ever were, subject to material terrors, fears of robbers, &c.—I am not so sure that a visitation, bearing a spectral character, would not shake your very mind. Be calm now. This is all a matter of the nerves, I see : but just specify the vision.”

“You will tell nobody?”

“Nobody—most certainly. You may trust me as implicitly as you did Père Silas. Indeed, the doctor is perhaps the safer confessor of the two, though he has not gray hair.”

“You will not laugh?”

“Perhaps I may, to do you good; but not in scorn. Lucy, I feel as a friend towards you, though your timid nature is slow to trust.”

He now looked like a friend: that indescribable smile and sparkle were gone; those formidable arched curves of lip, nostril, eyebrow, were depressed; repose marked his attitude—attention sobered his aspect. Won to confidence, I told him exactly what I had seen: ere now I had narrated to him the legend of the house—whiling away with that narrative an hour of a certain mild October afternoon, when he and I rode through Bois l’Etang.

He sat and thought, and while he thought, we heard them all coming down stairs.

“Are they going to interrupt?” said he, glancing at the door with an annoyed expression.

“They will not come here,” I answered; for we were in the little salon where Madame never sat in the evening, and where it was by mere chance

that heat was still lingering in the stove. They passed the door and went on to the *salle-à-manger*.

"Now," he pursued, "they will talk about thieves, burglars, and so on: let them do so—mind you say nothing, and keep your resolution of describing your nun to nobody. She may appear to you again: don't start."

"You think then," I said, with secret horror, "she came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?"

"I think it a case of spectral illusion: I fear, following on and resulting from long-continued mental conflict."

"Oh, Doctor John—I shudder at the thought of being liable to such an illusion! It seemed so real. Is there no cure?—no preventive?"

"Happiness is the cure—a cheerful ruin the preventive: cultivate both."

No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to *cultivate* happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. She is a divine dew which

the soul, on certain of its summer mornings, feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of Paradise.

"Cultivate happiness!" I said briefly to the doctor: "do *you* cultivate happiness? How do you manage?"

"I am a cheerful fellow by nature: and then ill-luck has never dogged me. Adversity gave me and my mother one passing scowl and brush, but we defied her, or rather laughed at her, and she went by."

"There is no cultivation in all this."

"I do not give way to melancholy."

"Yes: I have seen you subdued by that feeling."

"About Ginevra Fanshawe—eh?"

"Did she not sometimes make you miserable?"

"Pooh! stuff! nonsense! You see I am better now."

If a laughing eye with a lively light, and a face bright with beaming and healthy energy, could attest that he was better, better he certainly was.

"You do not look much amiss, or greatly out of condition," I allowed.

"And why, Lucy, can't you look and feel as I do—buoyant, courageous, and fit to defy all the nuns

and flirts in Christendom? I would give gold on the spot just to see you snap your fingers. Try the manœuvre."

"If I were to bring Miss Fanshawe into your presence just now?"

"I vow, Lucy, she should not move me: or, she should move me but by one thing — true, yes, and passionate love. I would accord forgiveness at no less a price."

"Indeed! a smile of hers would have been a fortune to you a while since."

"Transformed, Lucy: transformed! Remember, you once called me a slave! but I am a free man now!"

He stood up: in the port of his head, the carriage of his figure, in his beaming eye and mien, there revealed itself a liberty which was more than ease — a mood which was disdain of his past bondage.

"Miss Fanshawe," he pursued, "has led me through a phase of feeling which is over: I have entered another condition, and am now much disposed to exact love for love—passion for passion—and good measure of it too."

"Ah, Doctor! Doctor! you said it was your nature to pursue Love under difficulties—to be charmed by a proud insensibility!"



He laughed, and answered, "My nature varies: the mood of one hour is sometimes the mockery of the next. Well, Lucy" (drawing on his gloves), "will the Nun come again to-night, think you?"

"I don't think she will."

"Give her my compliments, if she does—Dr. John's compliments—and entreat her to have the goodness to wait a visit from him. Lucy, was she a pretty nun? Had she a pretty face? You have not told me that yet; and *that* is the really important point."

"She had a white cloth over her face," said I, "but her eyes glittered."

"Confusion to her goblin trappings!" cried he, irreverently: "but at least she had handsome eyes—bright and soft."

"Cold and fixed," was my reply.

"No, no, we'll none of her: she shall not haunt you, Lucy. Give her that shake of the hand, if she comes again. Will she stand *that*, do you think?"

"I thought it too kind and cordial for a ghost to stand; and so was the smile which matched it, and accompanied his 'Good night.'"

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And had there been anything in the garret? What did they discover? I believe, on the closest examination, their discoveries amounted to very little. They talked, at first, of the cloaks being disturbed; but Madame Beck told me afterwards she thought they hung much as usual: and as for the broken pane in the skylight, she affirmed that aperture was rarely without one or more panes broken or cracked: and besides, a heavy hail-storm had fallen a few days ago. Madame questioned me very closely as to what I had seen, but I only described an obscure figure clothed in black: I took care not to breathe the word "nun," certain that this word would at once suggest to her mind an idea of romance and unreality. She charged me to say nothing on the subject to any servant, pupil, or teacher, and highly commended my discretion in coming to her private *salle-à-manger*, instead of carrying the tale of horror to the school refectory. Thus the subject dropped. I was left secretly and sadly to wonder, in my own mind, whether that strange thing was of this world, or of a realm beyond the grave; or whether indeed it was only the child of malady, and I of that malady the prey.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

VASHTI.

To wonder sadly, did I say? No: a new influence began to act upon my life, and sadness, for a certain space, was held at bay. Conceive a dell, deep-hollowed in forest secresy; it lies in dimness and mist: its turf is dank, its herbage pale and humid. A storm or an axe makes a wide gap amongst the oak-trees; the breeze sweeps in; the sun looks down; the sad, cold dell, becomes a deep cup of lustre; high summer pours her blue glory and her golden light out of that beauteous sky, which till now the starved hollow never saw.

A new creed became mine—a belief in happiness.

It was three weeks since the adventure of the garret, and I possessed in that case, box, drawer up stairs, casketed with that first letter, four companions like to it, traced by the same firm pen,

sealed with the same clear seal, full of the same vital comfort. Vital comfort it seemed to me then : I read them in after years ; they were kind letters enough—pleasing letters, because composed by one well-pleased ; in the two last there were three or four closing lines half-gay, half-tender, “ by *feeling* touched, but not subdued.” Time, dear reader, mel-  
lowed them to a beverage of this mild quality ; but when I first tasted their elixir, fresh from the fount so honoured, it seemed juice of a divine vintage : a draught which Hebe might fill, and the very gods approve.

Does the reader, remembering what was said some pages back, care to ask how I answered these letters : whether under the dry, stinting check of Reason, or according to the full, liberal impulse of Feeling?

To speak truth, I compromised matters ; I served two masters : I bowed down in the house of Rimmon, and lifted the heart at another shrine. I wrote to these letters two answers—one for my own relief, the other for Graham’s perusal.

To begin with : Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors, drew against her bar and bolt, then we sat down, spread our paper, dipped in the ink an eager

pen, and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart. When we had done—when two sheets were covered with the language of a strongly-adherent affection, a rooted and active gratitude—(once, for all, in this parenthesis, I disclaim, with the utmost scorn, every sneaking suspicion of what are called “warmer feelings:” women do not entertain these “warmer feelings” where, from the commencement, through the whole progress of an acquaintance, they have never once been cheated of the conviction that to do so would be to commit a mortal absurdity: nobody ever launches into Love unless he has seen or dreamed the rising of Hope’s star over Love’s troubled waters)—when, then, I had given expression to a closely-clinging and deeply-honouring attachment—an attachment that wanted to attract to itself and take into its own lot all that was painful in the destiny of its object; that would, if it could, have absorbed and conducted away all storms and lightnings from an existence viewed with a passion of solicitude—then, just at that moment, the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and

send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right.

I did not live on letters only : I was visited, I was looked after ; once a week I was taken out to La Terrasse ; always I was made much of. Dr. Bretton failed not to tell me *why* he was so kind : “ To keep away the nun,” he said ; “ he was determined to dispute with her her prey. He had taken,” he declared, “ a thorough dislike to her, chiefly on account of that white face-cloth, and those cold gray eyes : the moment he heard of those odious particulars,” he affirmed, “ consummate disgust had incited him to oppose her ; he was determined to try whether he or she was the cleverest, and he only wished she would once more look in upon me when he was present : ” but *that* she never did. In short, he regarded me scientifically in the light of a patient, and at once exercised his professional skill, and gratified his natural benevolence, by a course of cordial and attentive treatment.

One evening, the first in December, I was walking by myself in the carré ; it was six o'clock ; the classe-doors were closed ; but within, the pupils, rampant in the license of evening recreation, were counterfeiting a miniature chaos. The carré was

quite dark, except a red light shining under and about the stove; the wide glass-doors and the long windows were frosted over; a crystal sparkle of starlight, here and there spangling this blanched winter veil, and breaking with scattered brilliants the paleness of its embroidery, proved it a clear night, though moonless. That I should dare to remain thus alone in darkness, showed that my nerves were regaining a healthy tone: I thought of the nun, but hardly feared her; though the staircase was behind me, leading up, through blind, black night, from landing to landing, to the haunted grenier. Yet I own my heart quaked, my pulse leaped, when I suddenly heard breathing and rustling, and turning, saw in the deep shadow of the steps a deeper shadow still—a shape that moved and descended. It paused a while at the classe door, and then it glided before me. Simultaneously came a clangor of the distant door-bell. Life-like sounds bring life-like feelings: this shape was too round and low for my gaunt nun: it was only Madame Beck on duty.

“Mademoiselle Lucy!” cried Rosine, bursting in, lamp in hand, from the corridor, “On est là pour vous au salon.”

Madame saw me, I saw Madame, Rosine saw us both: there was no mutual recognition. I made straight for the salon. There I found what I own I anticipated I should find—Dr. Bretton; but he was in evening-dress.

“The carriage is at the door,” said he; “my mother has sent it to take you to the theatre; she was going herself but an arrival has prevented her: she immediately said, ‘Take Lucy in my place.’ Will you go?”

“Just now? I am not dressed,” cried I, glancing despairingly at my dark merino.

“You have half an hour to dress. I should have given you notice, but I only determined on going since five o’clock, when I heard there was to be a genuine regale in the presence of a great actress.”

And he mentioned a name that thrilled me—a name that, in those days, could thrill Europe. It is hushed now: its once restless echoes are all still; she who bore it went years ago to her rest: night and oblivion long since closed above her; but *then* her day—a day of Sirius—stood at its full height, light and fervour.

“I’ll go; I will be ready in ten minutes,” I vowed. And away I flew, never once checked,



reader, by the thought which perhaps at this moment checks you : namely that to go anywhere with Graham and without Mrs. Bretton could be objectionable. I could not have conceived, much less have expressed, to Graham such thought—such scruple—without risk of exciting a tyrannous self-contempt ; of kindling an inward fire of shame so quenchless, and so devouring, that I think it would soon have licked up the very life in my veins. Besides, my godmother, knowing her son, and knowing me, would as soon have thought of chaperoning a sister with a brother, as of keeping anxious guard over our incomings and outgoings.

The present was no occasion for showy array ; my dun-mist crape would suffice, and I sought the same in the great oak-wardrobe in the dormitory, where hung no less than forty dresses. But there had been changes and reforms, and some innovating hand had pruned this same crowded wardrobe, and carried divers garments to the grenier—my crape amongst the rest. I must fetch it. I got the key, and went aloft fearless, almost thoughtless. I unlocked the door, I plunged in. The reader may believe it or not, but when I thus suddenly entered, that garret was not wholly dark as it should have

been: from one point there shone a solemn light, like a star, but broader. So plainly it shone, that it revealed the deep alcove with a portion of the tarnished scarlet curtain drawn over it. Instantly, silently, before my eyes, it vanished; so did the curtain and alcove: all that end of the garret became black as night. I ventured no research; I had not time nor will; snatching my dress, which hung on the wall, happily near the door, I rushed out, relocked the door with convulsed haste, and darted downwards to the dormitory.

But I trembled too much to dress myself: impossible to arrange hair or fasten hooks-and-eyes with such fingers, so I called Rosine and bribed her to help me. Rosine liked a bribe, so she did her best, smoothed and plaited my hair as well as a coiffeur would have done, placed the lace collar mathematically straight, tied the neck-ribbon accurately — in short, did her work like the neat-handed Phillis she could be when she chose. Having given me my handkerchief and gloves, she took the candle and lighted me down stairs. After all, I had forgotten my shawl; she ran back to fetch it; and I stood with Dr. John in the vestibule, waiting.

"What is this, Lucy?" said he, looking down at me narrowly. "Here is the old excitement. Ha! the nun again?"

But I utterly denied the charge: I was vexed to be suspected of a second illusion. He was sceptical.

"She has been, as sure as I live," said he; "her figure crossing your eyes leaves on them a peculiar gleam and expression not to be mistaken."

"She has *not* been," I persisted: for, indeed, I could deny her apparition with truth.

"The old symptoms are there," he affirmed; "a particular pale, and what the Scotch call a 'raised' look."

He was so obstinate, I thought it better to tell him what I really *had* seen. Of course with him, it was held to be another effect of the same cause: it was all optical illusion—nervous malady, and so on. Not one bit did I believe him; but I dared not contradict: doctors are so self-opinionated, so immovable in their dry, materialist views.

Rosine brought the shawl, and I was bundled into the carriage.

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The theatre was full — crammed to its roof: royal and noble were there; palace and hotel had emptied their inmates into those tiers so thronged and so hushed. Deeply did I feel myself privileged in having a place before that stage; I longed to see a being of whose powers I had heard reports which made me conceive peculiar anticipations. I wondered if she would justify her renown: with strange curiosity, with feelings severe and austere, yet of riveted interest, I waited. She was a study of such nature as had not encountered my eyes yet: a great and new planet she was: but in what shape? I waited her rising.

She rose at nine that December night: above the horizon I saw her come. She could shine yet with pale grandeur and steady might; but that star verged already on its judgment-day. Seen near, it was a chaos — hollow, half-consumed: an orb perished or perishing — half lava, half glow.

I had heard this woman termed “plain,” and I expected bony harshness and grimness — something large, angular, sallow. What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame.

For awhile—a long while—I thought it was only a woman, though an unique woman, who moved in might and grace before this multitude. By-and-by I recognized my mistake. Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength—for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate, she stood.

It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.

It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.

Swordsmen thrust through, and dying in their blood on the arena sand; bulls goring horses disembowelled, make a meeker vision for the public—a milder condiment for a people's palate—than Vashti torn by seven devils: devils which cried sore and rent the tenement they haunted, but still refused to be exorcised.

Suffering had struck that stage empress; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor

enduring, nor in finite measure, resenting it : she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance. She stood, not dressed, but draped in pale antique folds, long and regular like sculpture. A background and entourage and flooring of deepest crimson threw her out, white like alabaster — like silver : rather be it said, like Death.

Where was the artist of the Cleopatra ? Let him come and sit down and study this different vision. Let him seek here the mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed flesh he worshipped : let all materialists draw nigh and look on.

I have said that she does not *resent* her grief. No ; the weakness of that word would make it a lie. To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied : she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions. Before calamity she is a tigress ; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good ; tears water no harvest of wisdom : on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong ; and her

strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair. Even in the uttermost frenzy of energy is each mænad movement royally, imperially, incedingly upborne. Her hair, flying loose in revel or war, is still an angel's hair, and glorious under a halo. Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled. Heaven's light, following her exile, pierces its confines, and discloses their forlorn remoteness.

Place now the Cleopatra, or any other slug, before her as an obstacle, and see her cut through the pulpy mass as the scimitar of Saladin clove the down cushion. Let Paul Peter Rubens wake from the dead, let him rise out of his cerements, and bring into this presence all the army of his fat women; the magian power or prophet-virtue gifting that slight rod of Moses, could, at one waft, release and re-mingle a sea spell-parted, whelming the heavy host with the down-rush of overthrown sea-ramparts.

Vashti was not good, I was told; and I have said she did not look good: though a spirit, she was a spirit out of Tophet. Well, if so much of unholy force can arise from below, may not an equal

efflux of sacred essence descend one day from above?

What thought Dr. Graham of this being?

For long intervals I forgot to look how he demeaned himself, or to question what he thought. The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; the sunflower turned from the south to a fierce light, not solar—a rushing, red, cometary light—hot on vision and to sensation. I had seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what *might* be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was *not* done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen, winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent.

Miss Fanshawe, with her usual ripeness of judgment, pronounced Dr. Bretton a serious, impassioned man, too grave and too impressible. Not in such light did I ever see him: no such faults could I lay to his charge. His natural attitude was not the meditative, nor his natural mood the senti-



mental ; *impressionable* he was as dimpling water, but, almost as water, *unimpressible* : the breeze, the sun, moved him—metal could not grave, nor fire brand.

Dr. John *could* think, and think well, but he was rather a man of action than of thought ; he *could* feel, and feel vividly in his way, but his heart had no chord for enthusiasm : to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, embuing summer clouds ; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. When I took time and regained inclination to glance at him, it amused and enlightened me to discover that he was watching that sinister and sovereign Vashti, not with wonder, nor worship, nor yet dismay, but simply with intense curiosity. Her agony did not pain him, her wild moan—worse than a shriek—did not much move him ; her fury revolted him somewhat, but not to the point of horror. Cool young Briton ! The pale cliffs of his own England do not look down on the tides of the channel more calmly than he watched the Pythian inspiration of that night.

Looking at his face, I longed to know his exact opinions, and at last I put a question tending to elicit them. At the sound of my voice he awoke as if out of a dream; for he had been thinking, and very intently thinking, his own thoughts, after his own manner. "How did he like Vashti?" I wished to know.

"Hm-m-m," was the first scarce articulate but expressive answer; and then such a strange smile went wandering round his lips, a smile so critical, so almost callous! I suppose that for natures of that order his sympathies *were* callous. In a few terse phrases he told me his opinion of, and feeling towards, the actress: he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment.

That night was already marked in my book of life, not with white, but with a deep-red cross. But I had not done with it yet; and other memoranda were destined to be set down in characters of tint indelible.

Towards midnight, when the deepening tragedy blackened to the death scene, and all held their breath, and even Graham bit in his under lip, and knit his brow, and sat still and struck—when the whole theatre was hushed, when the vision of all

eyes centred in one point, when all ears listened towards one quarter—nothing being seen but the white form sunk on a seat, quivering in conflict with her last, her worst-hated, her visibly-conquering foe—nothing heard but her throes, her gaspings, breathing yet of mutiny, panting still defiance: when, as it seemed, an inordinate will, convulsing a perishing mortal frame, bent it to battle with doom and death, fought every inch of ground, sold dear every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, *would* see, *would* hear, *would* breathe, *would* live, up to, within, well nigh *beyond* the moment when death says to all sense and all being—

“Thus far and no farther!”

Just then a stir, pregnant with omen, rustled behind the scenes—feet ran, voices spoke. What was it? demanded the whole house. A flame, a smell of smoke replied.

“Fire!” rang through the gallery. “Fire!” was repeated, re-echoed, yelled forth: and then, and faster than pen can set it down, came panic, rushing, crushing—a blind, selfish, cruel chaos.

And Dr. John? Reader, I see him yet, with his look of comely courage and cordial calm.

"Lucy will sit still, I know," said he, glancing down at me with the same serene goodness, the same repose of firmness that I have seen in him when sitting at his side amid the secure peace of his mother's hearth. Yes, thus adjured, I think I would have sat still under a rocking crag: but, indeed, to sit still in actual circumstances was my instinct; and at the price of my very life, I would not have moved to give him trouble, thwart his will, or make demands on his attention. We were in the stalls, and for a few minutes there was a most terrible, ruthless pressure about us.

"How terrified are the women!" said he; "but if the men were not almost equally so, order might be maintained. This is a sorry scene: I see fifty selfish brutes at this moment, each of whom, if I were near, I could conscientiously knock down. I see some women braver than some men. There is one yonder—Good God!"

While Graham was speaking, a young girl who had been very quietly and steadily clinging to a gentleman standing before us, was suddenly struck from her protector's arms by a big, butcherly intruder, and hurled under the feet of the crowd. Scarce two seconds lasted her disappearance. Gra-

ham rushed forwards; he and the gentleman, a powerful man though gray-haired, united their strength to thrust back the throng; her head and long hair fell back over his shoulder: she seemed unconscious.

"Trust her with me; I am a medical man," said Dr. John.

"If you have no lady with you, be it so," was the answer. "Hold her, and I will force a passage: we must get her to the air."

"I have a lady," said Graham, "but she will be neither hindrance nor incumbrance."

He summoned me with his eye: we were separated. Resolute, however, to rejoin him, I penetrated the living barrier, creeping under, where I could not get between or over.

"Fasten on me, and don't leave go," he said; and I obeyed him.

Our pioneer proved strong and adroit; he opened the dense mass like a wedge; with patience and toil he at last bored through the flesh-and-blood rock—so solid, hot, and suffocating—and brought us to the fresh, freezing night.

"You are an Englishman!" said he, turning shortly on Dr. Bretton, when we got into the street.

"An Englishman. And I speak to a country-man?" was the reply.

"Right. Be good enough to stand here two minutes, whilst I find my carriage."

"Papa, I am not hurt," said a girlish voice, "am I with papa?"

"You are with a friend, and your father is close at hand."

"Tell him I am not hurt, except just in my shoulder. Oh, my shoulder! They trode just here."

"Dislocation, perhaps!" muttered the Doctor: "let us hope there is no worse injury done. Lucy, lend a hand one instant."

And I assisted while he made some arrangement of drapery and position for the ease of his suffering burden. She suppressed a moan, and lay in his arms quietly and patiently.

"She is very light," said Graham, "like a child!" and he asked in my ear, "Is she a child, Lucy? Did you notice her age?"

"I am not a child—I am a person of seventeen," responded the patient demurely and with dignity. Then, directly after:

"Tell papa to come; I get anxious."

The carriage drove up ; her father relieved Graham ; but in the exchange from one bearer to another she was hurt, and moaned again.

“ My darling ! ” said the father tenderly ; then turning to Graham, “ You said, sir, you are a medical man ? ”

“ I am : Dr. Bretton, of La Terrasse. ”

“ Good. Will you step into my carriage ? ”

“ My own carriage is here : I will seek it, and accompany you. ”

“ Be pleased, then, to follow us. ” And he named his address : “ The Hotel Crécy, in the Rue Crécy. ”

We followed ; the carriage drove fast ; myself and Graham were silent. This seemed like an adventure.

Some little time being lost in seeking our own equipage, we reached the hotel, perhaps, about ten minutes after these strangers. It was an hotel in the foreign sense : a collection of dwelling-houses, not an inn—a vast, lofty pile, with a huge arch to its street-door, leading through a vaulted covered way, into a square all built round.

We alighted, passed up a wide, handsome public staircase, and stopped at Numéro 2 on the second landing ; the first floor comprising the abode of I

know not what "prince Russe," as Graham informed me. On ringing the bell at a second great door, we were admitted to a suite of very handsome apartments. Announced by a servant in livery, we entered a drawing-room whose hearth glowed with an English fire, and whose walls gleamed with foreign mirrors. Near the hearth appeared a little group; a slight form sunk in a deep arm-chair, one or two women busy about it, the iron-gray gentleman anxiously looking on.

"Where is Harriet? I wish Harriet would come to me," said the girlish voice, faintly.

"Where is Mrs. Hurst?" demanded the gentleman impatiently and somewhat sternly of the manservant who had admitted us.

"I am sorry to say she is gone out of town, sir; my young lady gave her leave till to-morrow."

"Yes—I did—I did. She is gone to see her sister; I said she might go: I remember now," interposed the young lady; "but I am so sorry, for Manon and Louison cannot understand a word I say, and they hurt me without meaning to do so."

Dr. John and the gentleman now interchanged greetings; and while they passed a few minutes in consultation, I approached the easy-chair, and see-



ing what the faint and sinking girl wished to have done, I did it for her.

I was still occupied in the arrangement, when Graham drew near; he was no less skilled in surgery than medicine, and, on examination, found that no further advice than his own was necessary to the treatment of the present case. He ordered her to be carried to her chamber, and whispered to me:—

“Go with the women, Lucy; they seem but dull; you can at least direct their movements, and thus spare her some pain. She must be touched very tenderly.”

The chamber was a room shadowy with pale-blue hangings, vaporous with curtainings and veilings of muslin; the bed seemed to me like snow-drift and mist—spotless, soft, and gauzy. Making the women stand apart, I undressed their mistress, without their well-meaning but clumsy aid. I was not in a sufficiently collected mood to note with separate distinctness every detail of the attire I removed, but I received a general impression of refinement, delicacy, and perfect personal cultivation; which, in a period of after-thought, offered in my reflections a singular contrast to notes retained of Miss Ginevra Fanshawe's appointments.

This girl was herself a small, delicate creature, but made like a model. As I folded back her plentiful yet fine hair, so shining and soft, and so exquisitely tended, I had under my observation a young, pale, weary, but high-bred face. The brow was smooth and clear; the eyebrows were distinct, but soft, and melting to a mere trace at the temples; the eyes were a rich gift of nature—fine and full, large, deep, seeming to hold dominion over the slighter subordinate features—capable, probably, of much significance at another hour and under other circumstances than the present, but now languid and suffering. Her skin was perfectly fair, the neck and hands veined finely like the petals of a flower; a thin glazing of the ice of pride, polished this delicate exterior, and her lip wore a curl—I doubt not inherent and unconscious, but which, if I had seen it first with the accompaniments of health and state, would have struck me as unwarranted, and proving in the little lady a quite mistaken view of life and her own consequence.

Her demeanour under the Doctor's hands at first excited a smile: it was not puerile—rather, on the whole, patient and firm—but yet, once or twice she addressed him with suddenness and sharpness, say-

ing that he hurt her, and must contrive to give her less pain ; I saw her large eyes, too, settle on his face like the solemn eyes of some pretty, wondering child. I know not whether Graham felt this examination : if he did, he was cautious not to check or discomfit it by any retaliatory look. I think he performed his work with extreme care and gentleness, sparing her what pain he could ; and she acknowledged as much, when he had done, by the words :—

“Thank you, Doctor, and good night,” very gratefully pronounced : as she uttered them, however, it was with a repetition of the serious, direct gaze, I thought, peculiar in its gravity and intentness

The injuries, it seems, were not dangerous : an assurance which her father received with a smile that almost made one his friend—it was so glad and gratified. He now expressed his obligations to Graham with as much earnestness as was befitting an Englishman addressing one who has served him, but is yet a stranger ; he also begged him to call the next day.

“Papa,” said a voice from the veiled couch, “thank the lady, too : is she there?”

I opened the curtain with a smile, and looked in

at her. She lay now at comparative ease; she looked pretty, though pale; her face was delicately designed, and if at first sight it appeared proud, I believe custom might prove it to be soft.

“I thank the lady very sincerely,” said her father: “I fancy she has been very good to my child. I think we scarcely dare tell Mrs. Hurst who has been her substitute and done her work; she will feel at once ashamed and jealous.”

And thus, in the most friendly spirit, parting greetings were interchanged; and refreshment having been hospitably offered, but by us, as it was late, refused, we withdrew from the Hotel Cr  cy.

On our way back we repassed the theatre. All was silence and darkness: the roaring, rushing crowd all vanished and gone—the lamps, as well as the incipient fire, extinct and forgotten. Next morning’s papers explained that it was but some loose drapery on which a spark had fallen, and which had blazed up and been quenched in a moment.

## CHAPTER XXV.

M. DE BASSOMPIERRE.

THOSE who live in retirement, whose lives have fallen amid the seclusion of schools or of other walled-in and guarded dwellings, are liable to be suddenly and for a long while dropped out of the memory of their friends, the denizens of a freer world. Unaccountably, perhaps, and close upon some space of unusually frequent intercourse—some congeries of rather exciting little circumstances, whose natural sequel would rather seem to be the quickening than the suspension of communication—there falls a stilly pause, a wordless silence, a long blank of oblivion. Unbroken always is this blank; alike entire and unexplained. The letter, the message once frequent, are cut off; the visit, formerly periodical, ceases to occur; the book, paper, or

other token that indicated remembrance, comes no more.

Always there are excellent reasons for these lapses, if the hermit but knew them. Though he is stagnant in his cell, his connections without are whirling in the very vortex of life. That void interval which passes for him so slowly that the very clocks seem at a stand, and the wingless hours plod by in the likeness of tired tramps prone to rest at milestones—that same interval, perhaps, teems with events, and pants with hurry for his friends.

The hermit—if he be a sensible hermit—will swallow his own thoughts, and lock up his own emotions during these weeks of inward winter. He will know that Destiny designed him to imitate, on occasion, the dormouse, and he will be conformable: make a tidy ball of himself, creep into a hole of life's wall, and submit decently to the drift which blows in and soon blocks him up, preserving him in ice for the season.

Let him say, "It is quite right: it ought to be so, since so it is." And, perhaps, one day his snow-sepulchre will open, spring's softness will return, the sun and south-wind will reach him; the budding of hedges, and carolling of birds and singing of

liberated streams will call him to kindly resurrection. *Perhaps* this may be the case, perhaps not: the frost may get into his heart and never thaw more; when spring comes, a crow or a pie may pick out of the wall only his dormouse-bones. Well, even in that case, all will be right: it is to be supposed he knew from the first he was mortal, and must one day go the way of all flesh, "As well soon as syne."

Following that eventful evening at the theatre, came for me seven weeks as bare as seven sheets of blank paper: no word was written on one of them; not a visit, not a token.

About the middle of that time I entertained fancies that something had happened to my friends at La Terrasse. The mid-blank is always a beclouded point for the solitary: his nerves ache with the strain of long expectancy; the doubts hitherto repelled gather now to a mass and—strong in accumulation—roll back upon him with a force which savours of vindictiveness. Night, too, becomes an unkindly time, and sleep and his nature cannot agree: strange starts and struggles harass his couch; the sinister band of bad dreams, with horror of calamity, and sick dread of entire desertion at

their head, join the league against him. Poor wretch! He does his best to bear up, but he is a poor, pallid, wasting wretch, despite that best.

Towards the last of those long seven weeks I admitted, what through the other six I had jealously excluded—the conviction that these blanks were inevitable: the result of circumstances, the fiat of fate, a part of my life's lot, and—above all—a matter about whose origin no question must ever be asked, for whose painful sequence no murmur ever uttered. Of course I did not blame myself for suffering: I thank God I had a truer sense of justice than to fall into any imbecile extravagances of self-accusation; and as to blaming others for silence, in my reason I well knew them blameless, and in my heart acknowledged them so: but it was a rough and heavy road to travel, and I longed for better days.

I tried different expedients to sustain and fill existence: I commenced an elaborate piece of lace-work, I studied German pretty hard, I undertook a course of regular reading of the driest and thickest books in the library; in all my efforts I was as orthodox as I knew how to be. Was there error somewhere? Very likely. I only know the result



was as if I had gnawed a file to satisfy hunger, or drank brine to quench thirst.

My hour of torment was the post-hour. Unfortunately I knew it too well, and tried as vainly as assiduously to cheat myself of that knowledge; dreading the rack of expectation, and the sick collapse of disappointment which daily preceded and followed upon that well-recognized ring.

I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always upon the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter. Oh!—to speak truth, and drop that tone of a false calm which long to sustain, outwears nature's endurance.—I underwent in those seven weeks bitter fears and pains, strange inward trials, miserable defections of hope, intolerable encroachments of despair. This last came so near me sometimes that her breath went right through me. I used to feel it, like a baleful air or sigh, penetrate deep, and make motion pause at my heart, or proceed only under unspeakable oppression. The letter—the well-beloved letter—would not come; and it was all of sweetness in life I had to look for.

In the very extremity of want, I had recourse again, and yet again, to the little packet in the case

—the five letters. How splendid that month seemed whose skies had beheld the rising of these five stars ! It was always at night I visited them, and not daring to ask every evening for a candle in the kitchen, I bought a wax-taper and matches to light it, and at the study-hour stole up to the dormitory, and feasted on my crust from the Barmecide's loaf. It did not nourish me: I pined on it, and got as thin as a shadow: otherwise I was not ill.

Reading there somewhat late one evening, and feeling that the power to read was leaving me—for the letters from incessant perusal were losing all sap and significance: my gold was withering to leaves before my eyes, and I was sorrowing over the disillusion—suddenly a quick tripping foot ran up the stairs. I knew Ginevra Fanshawe's step: she had dined in town that afternoon; she was now returned, and would come here to replace her shawl, &c., in the wardrobe.

Yes: in she came, dressed in bright silk, with her shawl falling from her shoulders, and her curls, half-uncurled in the damp of night, drooping careless and heavy upon her neck. I had hardly time to recasket my treasures and lock them up when she was at my side: her humour seemed none of the best.

"It has been a stupid evening: they are stupid people," she began.

"Who? Mrs. Cholmondeley? I thought you always found her house charming."

"I have not been to Mrs. Cholmondeley's."

"Indeed! Have you made new acquaintance?"

"My uncle de Bassompierre is come."

"Your uncle de Bassompierre! Are you not glad?—I thought he was a favourite."

"You thought wrong: the man is odious; I hate him."

"Because he is a foreigner? or for what other reason of equal weight?"

"He is not a foreigner. The man is English enough, goodness knows; and had an English name till three or four years ago; but his mother was a foreigner, a de Bassompierre, and some of her family are dead and have left him estates, a title, and this name: he is quite a great man now."

"Do you hate him for that reason?"

"Don't I know what mama says about him? He is not my own uncle, but married mama's sister. Mama detests him; she says he killed aunt Ginevra with unkindness: he looks like a bear. Such a dismal evening!" she went on. "I'll go no more

to his big hotel. Fancy me walking into a room alone, and a great man fifty years old coming forwards, and after a few minutes' conversation actually turning his back upon me, and then abruptly going out of the room. Such odd ways! I dare say his conscience smote him, for they all say at home I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra. Mama often declares the likeness is quite ridiculous."

"Were you the only visitor?"

"The only visitor? Yes, then there was missy, my cousin: little spoiled, pampered thing."

"M. de Bassompierre has a daughter?"

"Yes, yes: don't tease one with questions. Oh dear! I am so tired."

She yawned. Throwing herself without ceremony on my bed, she added, "It seems Mademoiselle was nearly crushed to a jelly in a hubbub at the theatre some weeks ago."

"Ah! indeed. And they live at a large hotel in the Rue Cr  cy?"

"Justement. How do *you* know?"

"I have been there."

"Oh you have? Really! You go everywhere in these days. I suppose Mother Bretton took you? She and Esculapius have the *entr  e* of the

de Bassompierre apartments: it seems 'my son John' attended missy on the occasion of her accident—accident? Bah! All affectation! I don't think she was squeezed more than she richly deserves for her airs. And now there is quite an intimacy struck up: I heard something about 'Auld lang syne,' and what not? Oh, how stupid they all were!"

"*All!* You said you were the only visitor?"

"Did I? You see one forgets to particularize an old woman and her boy."

"Dr. and Mrs. Bretton were at M. de Bassompierre's this evening?"

"Ay, ay! as large as life; and missy played the hostess. What a conceited doll it is!"

Soured and listless, Miss Fanshawe was beginning to disclose the causes of her prostrate condition. There had been a retrenchment of incense, a diversion or a total withholding of homage and attention: coquetry had failed of effect, vanity had undergone mortification. She lay fuming in the vapours.

"Is Miss de Bassompierre quite well now?" I asked.

"As well as you or I, no doubt; but she is an

affected little thing, and gave herself invalid airs to attract medical notice. And to see the old dowager making her recline on a couch, and ‘my son John’ prohibiting excitement, etcetera—faugh! the scene was quite sickening.”

“It would not have been so if the object of attention had been changed: if *you* had taken Miss de Bassompierre’s place.”

“Indeed! I hate ‘my son John!’”

“‘My son John!’—whom do you indicate by that name? Dr. Bretton’s mother never calls him so.”

“Then she ought. A clownish, bearish John he is.”

“You violate the truth in saying so; and as the whole of my patience is now spun off the distaff, I peremptorily desire you to rise from that bed, and vacate this room.”

“Passionate thing! Your face is the colour of a coquelicot. I wonder what always makes you so mighty testy à l’endroit du gros Jean? ‘John Anderson, my joe, John!’ Oh! the distinguished name!”

Thrilling with exasperation, to which it would have been sheer folly to have given vent—for there was no contending with that unsubstantial feather,

that mealy-winged moth—I extinguished my taper, locked my bureau, and left her, since she would not leave me. Small-beer as she was, she had turned insufferably acid.

The morrow was Thursday and a half-holiday. Breakfast was over; I had withdrawn to the first classe. The dreaded hour, the post-hour, was nearing, and I sat waiting it, much as a ghost-seer might wait his spectre. Less than ever was a letter probable; still, strive as I would, I could not forget that it was possible. As the moments lessened, a restlessness and fear almost beyond the average assailed me. It was a day of winter east wind, and I had now for some time entered into that dreary fellowship with the winds and their changes, so little known, so incomprehensible to the healthy. The north and east owned a terrific influence, making all pain more poignant, all sorrow sadder. The south could calm, the west sometimes cheer: unless, indeed, they brought on their wings the burden of thunder-clouds, under the weight and warmth of which all energy died.

Bitter and dark as was this January day, I remember leaving the classe, and running down without bonnet to the bottom of the long gar-

den, and then lingering amongst the stripped shrubs; in the forlorn hope that the postman's ring might occur while I was out of hearing, and I might thus be spared the thrill which some particular nerve or nerves, almost gnawed through with the unremitting tooth of a fixed idea, were becoming wholly unfit to support. I lingered as long as I dared without fear of attracting attention by my absence. I muffled my head in my apron, and stopped my ears in terror of the torturing clang, sure to be followed by such blank silence, such barren vacuum for me. At last I ventured to re-enter the first-classe, where, as it was not yet nine o'clock, no pupils had been admitted. The first thing seen was a white object on my black desk, a white, flat object. The post had, indeed, arrived; by me unheard. Rosine had visited my cell, and, like some angel, had left behind her a bright token of her presence. That shining thing on the desk was indeed a letter, a real letter; I saw so much at the distance of three yards, and as I had but one correspondent on earth, from that one it must come. He remembered me yet. How deep a pulse of gratitude sent new life through my heart.

Drawing near, bending and looking on the letter,



in trembling but almost certain hope of seeing a known hand, it was my lot to find, on the contrary, an autograph for the moment deemed unknown—a pale female scrawl, instead of a firm masculine character. I then thought fate was *too* hard for me, and I said, audibly, “This is cruel.”

But I got over that pain also. Life is still life, whatever its pangs: our eyes and ears and their use remain with us, though the prospect of what pleases be wholly withdrawn, and the sound of what consoles be quite silenced.

I opened the billet: by this time I had recognized its handwriting as perfectly familiar. It was dated “La Terrasse,” and it ran thus:—

“DEAR LUCY,—It occurs to me to inquire what you have been doing with yourself for the last month or two? Not that I suspect you would have the least difficulty in giving an account of your proceedings. I daresay you have been just as busy and happy as ourselves at La Terrasse. As to Graham, his professional connection extends daily: he is so much sought after, so much engaged, that I tell him he will grow quite conceited. Like a right good mother, as I am, I do my best to keep

him down : no flattery does he get from me, as you know. And yet, Lucy, he is a fine fellow ; his mother's heart dances at the sight of him. After being hurried here and there the whole day, and passing the ordeal of fifty sorts of tempers, and combating a hundred caprices, and sometimes witnessing cruel sufferings—perhaps, occasionally, as I tell him, inflicting them—at night he still comes home to me in such kindly, pleasant mood, that, really, I seem to live in a sort of moral antipodes, and on these January evenings my day rises when other people's night sets in.

“ Still he needs keeping in order, and correcting, and repressing, and I do him that good service ; but the boy is so elastic there is no such thing as vexing him thoroughly. When I think I have at last driven him to the sullens, he turns on me with jokes for retaliation : but you know him and all his iniquities, and I am but an elderly simpleton to make him the subject of this epistle.

“ As for me, I have had my old Bretton agent here on a visit, and have been plunged over head and ears in business matters. I do so wish to regain for Graham at least some part of what his father left him. He laughs to scorn my anxiety

on this point, bidding me look and see how he can provide for himself and me too, and asking what the old lady can possibly want that she has not; hinting about sky-blue turbans; accusing me of an ambition to wear diamonds, keep livery servants, have an hotel, and lead the fashion amongst the English clan in Villette.

“Talking of sky-blue turbans, I wished you had been with us the other evening. He had come in really tired; and after I had given him his tea, he threw himself into my chair with his customary presumption. To my great delight, he dropped asleep. (You know how he teazes me about being drowsy; I, who never, by any chance, close an eye by daylight). While he slept, I thought he looked very bonny, Lucy: fool as I am to be so proud of him: but who can help it? Show me his peer. Look where I will I see nothing like him in Villette. Well, I took it into my head to play him a trick: so I brought out the sky-blue turban, and handling it and him with gingerly precaution, I managed to invest his brows with this grand adornment. I assure you it did not at all misbecome him; he looked quite Eastern, except that he is so fair. Nobody, however, can

accuse him of having red hair *now*—it is genuine chestnut—a dark, glossy chestnut; and when I put my large Cashmere about him, there was as fine a young bey, dey, or pacha improvised as you would wish to see.

“It was good entertainment; but only half-enjoyed, since I was alone: *you* should have been there.

“In due time my lord awoke: the looking-glass above the fireplace soon intimated to him his plight: as you may imagine, I now live under threat and dread of vengeance.

“But to come to the gist of my letter. I know Thursday is a half-holiday in the Rue Fossette: be ready, then, by five in the afternoon, at which hour I will send the carriage to take you out to La Terrasse. Be sure to come: you may meet some old acquaintance. Good-by, my wise, dear, grave little god-daughter.—Very truly, yours,

“LOUISA BRETTON.”

Now, a letter like that sets one to rights! I might still be sad after reading that letter, but I was more composed; not exactly cheered, perhaps, but relieved. My friends, at least, were well and

happy: no accident had occurred to Graham; no illness had seized his mother—calamities that had so long been my dream and thought. Their feelings for me too were—as they had been. Yet, how strange it was to look on Mrs. Bretton's seven weeks and contrast them with my seven weeks! Also, how very wise it is in people placed in an exceptional position to hold their tongues and not rashly declare how such position galls them! The world can understand well enough the process of perishing for want of food: perhaps few persons can enter into or follow out that of going mad from solitary confinement. They see the long-buried prisoner disinterred, a maniac or an idiot!—how his senses left him—how his nerves, first inflamed, underwent nameless agony, and then sunk to palsy—is a subject too intricate for examination, too abstract for popular comprehension. Speak of it! you might almost as well stand up in an European market-place, and propound dark sayings in that language and mood wherein Nebuchadnezzar, the imperial hypochondriac, communed with his baffled Chaldeans. And long, long may the minds to whom such themes are no mystery—by whom their bearings are sympathetically seized—be few in

number, and rare of rencounter. Long may it be generally thought that physical privations alone merit compassion, and that the rest is a figment. When the world was younger and haler than now, moral trials were a deeper mystery still: perhaps in all the land of Israel there was but one Saul—certainly but one David to soothe or comprehend him.

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The keen, still cold of the morning was succeeded, later in the day, by a sharp breathing from Russian wastes: the cold zone sighed over the temperate zone, and froze it fast. A heavy firmament, dull, and thick with snow, sailed up from the north, and settled over expectant Europe. Towards afternoon began the descent. I feared no carriage would come—the white tempest raged so dense and wild. But trust my godmother! Once having asked, she would have her guest. About six o'clock I was lifted from the carriage over the already blocked-up front steps of the chateau, and put in at the door of La Terrasse.

Running through the vestibule, and up-stairs to the drawing-room, there I found Mrs. Bretton—a summer-day in her own person. Had I been twice

as cold as I was, her kind kiss and cordial clasp would have warmed me. Inured now for so long a time to rooms with bare boards, black benches, desks, and stoves, the blue saloon seemed to me gorgeous. In its Christmas-like fire alone there was a clear and crimson splendour which quite dazzled me.

When my godmother had held my hand for a little while, and chatted with me, and scolded me for having become thinner than when she last saw me, she professed to discover that the snow-wind had disordered my hair, and sent me up-stairs to make it neat, and remove my shawl.

Repairing to my own little sea-green room, there also I found a bright fire, and candles too were lit: a tall waxlight stood on each side the great looking-glass; but between the candles, and before the glass, appeared something dressing itself—an airy, fairy thing—small, slight, white—a winter spirit.

I declare, for one moment I thought of Graham and his spectral illusions. With distrustful eye I noted the details of this new vision. It wore white, sprinkled slightly with drops of scarlet; its girdle was red; it had something in its hair leafy, yet shining—a little wreath with an evergreen

gloss. Spectral or not, here truly was nothing frightful, and I advanced.

Turning quick upon me, a large eye, under long lashes, flashed over me, the intruder: the lashes were as dark as long, and they softened with their pencilling the orb they guarded.

"Ah! you are come!" she breathed out, in a soft, quiet voice, and she smiled slowly, and gazed intently.

I knew her now. Having only once seen that sort of face, with that cast of fine and delicate featuring, I could not but know her.

"Miss de Bassompierre," I pronounced.

"No," was the reply, "not Miss de Bassompierre for *you*." I did not inquire who then she might be, but waited voluntary information.

"You are changed, but still you are yourself," she said, approaching nearer. "I remember you well—your countenance, the colour of your hair, the outline of your face. . . ."

I had moved to the fire, and she stood opposite, and gazed into me; and as she gazed, her face became gradually more and more expressive of thought and feeling, till at last a dimness quenched her clear vision.



"It makes me almost cry to look so far back," said she; "but as to being sorry, or sentimental, don't think it: on the contrary, I am quite pleased and glad."

Interested, yet altogether at fault, I knew not what to say. At last I stammered, "I think I never met you till that night, some weeks ago, when you were hurt . . .?"

She smiled. "You have forgotten then that I have sat on your knee, been lifted in your arms, even shared your pillow? You no longer remember the night when I came crying, like a naughty little child as I was, to your bedside, and you took me in? You have no memory for the comfort and protection by which you soothed an acute distress? Go back to Bretton. Remember Mr. Home."

At last I saw it all. "And you are little Polly?"

"I am Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre."

How time can change! Little Polly wore in her pale, small features, her fairy symmetry, her varying expression, a certain promise of interest and grace; but Paulina Mary was become beautiful—not with the beauty that strikes the eye

like a rose—orbéd, ruddy, and replete; not with the plump, and pink, and flaxen attributes of her blond cousin Ginevra; but her seventeen years had brought her a refined and tender charm which did not lie in complexion, though hers was fair and clear; nor in outline, though her features were sweet, and her limbs perfectly turned; but, I think, rather in a subdued glow from the soul outward. This was not an opaque vase, of material however costly, but a lamp chastely lucent, guarding from extinction, yet not hiding from worship, a flame vital and vestal. In speaking of her attractions, I would not exaggerate language; but, indeed, they seemed to me very real and engaging. What though all was on a small scale, it was the perfume which gave this white violet distinction, and made it superior to the broadest camelia—the fullest dahlia that ever bloomed.

“Ah! and you remember the old time at Bretton?”

“Better,” said she, “better, perhaps, than you. I remember it with minute distinctness: not only the time, but the days of the time, and the hours of the days.”

“You must have forgotten some things?”

“Very little, I imagine.”

“You were then a little creature of quick feelings: you must, long ere this, have outgrown the impressions with which joy and grief, affection and bereavement, stamped your mind ten years ago?”

“You think I have forgotten whom I liked, and in what degree I liked them when a child?”

“The sharpness must be gone—the point, the poignancy—the deep imprint must be softened away and effaced?”

“I have a good memory for those days.”

She looked as if she had. Her eyes were the eyes of one who can remember; one whose childhood does not fade like a dream, nor whose youth vanish like a sunbeam. She would not take life, loosely and incoherently, in parts, and let one season slip as she entered on another: she would retain and add; often review from the commencement, and so grow in harmony and consistency as she grew in years. Still I could not quite admit the conviction that *all* the pictures which now crowded upon me were vivid and visible to her. Her fond attachments, her sports and contests with a well-loved playmate, the patient, true devotion

of her child's heart, her fears, her delicate reserves, her little trials, the last piercing pain of separation, . . . . I retraced these things, and shook my head incredulous. She persisted. "The child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen," said she.

"You used to be excessively fond of Mrs. Bretton," I remarked, intending to test her. She set me right at once.

"Not *excessively* fond," said she; "I liked her: I respected her, as I should do now: she seems to me very little altered."

"She is not much changed," I assented.

We were silent a few minutes. Glancing round the room, she said—

"There are several things here that used to be at Bretton. I remember that pincushion and that looking-glass."

Evidently she was not deceived in her estimate of her own memory; not, at least, so far.

"You think, then, you would have known Mrs. Bretton?" I went on.

"I perfectly remembered her; the turn of her features, her olive complexion, and black hair, her height, her walk, her voice."

“Dr. Bretton, of course,” I pursued, “would be out of the question: and, indeed, as I saw your first interview with him, I am aware that he appeared to you as a stranger.”

“That first night I was puzzled,” she answered.

“How did the recognition between him and your father come about?”

“They exchanged cards. The names Graham Bretton and Home de Bassompierre give rise to questions and explanations. That was on the second day; but before then I was beginning to know something.”

“How—know something?”

“Why,” she said, “how strange it is that most people seem so slow to feel the truth—not to see, but *feel*! When Dr. Bretton had visited me a few times, and sat near and talked to me; when I had observed the look in his eyes, the expression about his mouth, the form of his chin, the carriage of his head, and all that we *do* observe in persons who approach us—how could I avoid being led by association to think of Graham Bretton? Graham was slighter than he, and not grown so tall, and had a smoother face, and longer and lighter hair, and spoke—not so deeply—more like a girl; but yet *he*

is Graham, just as *I* am little Polly, or you are Lucy Snowe."

I thought the same, but I wondered to find my thoughts hers: there are certain things in which we so rarely meet with our double that it seems a miracle when that chance befalls.

"You and Graham were once playmates."

"And do you remember that?" she questioned in her turn.

"No doubt he will remember it also," said I.

"I have not asked him: few things would surprise me so much as to find that he did. I suppose his disposition is still gay and careless?"

"Was it so formerly? Did it so strike you? Do you thus remember him?"

"I scarcely remember him in any other light. Sometimes he was studious; sometimes he was merry: but whether busy with his books or disposed for play, it was chiefly the books or game he thought of; not much heeding those with whom he read or amused himself."

"Yet to you he was partial."

"Partial to me? Oh, no! he had other playmates—his school-fellows; I was of little consequence to him, except on Sundays: yes, he was kind

on Sundays. I remember walking with him hand in hand to St. Mary's, and his finding the places in my prayer-book; and how good and still he was on Sunday evenings! So mild for such a proud, lively boy; so patient with all my blunders in reading; and so wonderfully to be depended on, for he never spent those evenings from home: I had a constant fear that he would accept some invitation and forsake us; but he never did, nor seemed ever to wish to do it. Thus, of course, it can be no more. I suppose Sunday will now be Dr. Bretton's dining-out day. . . .?"

"Children, come down!" here called Mrs. Bretton from below. Paulina would still have lingered, but I inclined to descend: we went down.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE LITTLE COUNTESS.

CHEERFUL as my godmother naturally was, and entertaining as, for our sakes, she made a point of being, there was no true enjoyment that evening at La Terrasse, till, through the wild howl of the winter-night, were heard the signal sounds of arrival. How often, while women and girls sit warm at snug fire-sides, their hearts and imaginations are doomed to divorce from the comfort surrounding their persons, forced out by night to wander through dark ways, to dare stress of weather, to contend with the snow-blast, to wait at lonely gates and stiles in wildest storms, watching and listening to see and hear the father, the son, the husband coming home.

Father and son came at last to the chateau : for the Count de Bassompierre that night accompanied



Dr. Bretton. I know not which of our trio heard the horses first; the asperity, the violence of the weather warranted our running down into the hall to meet and greet the two riders as they came in; but they warned us to keep our distance: both were white—two mountains of snow; and indeed Mrs. Bretton, seeing their condition, ordered them instantly to the kitchen; prohibiting them, at their peril, from setting foot on her carpeted staircase till they had severally put off that mask of Old Christmas they now affected. Into the kitchen, however, we could not help following them: it was a large old Dutch kitchen, picturesque and pleasant. The little white Countess danced in a circle about her equally white sire, clapping her hands and crying,—

“Papa, papa, you look like an enormous Polar bear.”

The bear shook himself, and the little sprite fled far from the frozen shower. Back she came, however, laughing, and eager to aid in removing the arctic disguise. The Count, at last issuing from his dreadnought, threatened to overwhelm her with it as with an avalanche.

“Come, then,” said she, bending to invite the fall,

and when it was playfully advanced above her head, bounding out of reach like some little chamois.

Her movements had the supple softness, the velvet grace of a kitten; her laugh was clearer than the ring of silver and crystal: as she took her sire's cold hands and rubbed them, and stood on tiptoe to reach his lips for a kiss, there seemed to shine round her a halo of loving delight. The grave and reverend signior looked down on her as men *do* look on what is the apple of their eye.

"Mrs. Bretton," said he; "what am I to do with this daughter or daughterling of mine? She neither grows in wisdom nor in stature. Don't you find her pretty nearly as much the child as she was ten years ago?"

"She cannot be more the child than this great boy of mine," said Mrs. Bretton, who was in conflict with her son about some change of dress she deemed advisable, and which he resisted. He stood leaning against the Dutch dresser, laughing and keeping her at arms' length.

"Come, mama," said he, "by way of compromise, and to secure for us inward as well as outward warmth, let us have a Christmas wassail-cup, and toast Old England here, on the hearth."

So, while the Count stood by the fire, and Paulina Mary still danced to and fro—happy in the liberty of the wide hall-like kitchen—Mrs. Bretton herself instructed Martha to spice and heat the wassail-bowl, and, pouring the draught into a Bretton flagon, it was served round, reaming hot, by means of a small silver vessel, which I recognised as Graham's christening-cup.

“Here's to Auld Lang Syne!” said the Count; holding the glancing cup on high. Then, looking at Mrs. Bretton:—

“We twa ha' paidlet i' the burn  
Fra morning-sun till dine,  
But seas between us braid ha' roared  
Sin' auld lang syne.

“And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup,  
As surely I'll be mine;  
And we'll taste a cup o' kindness yet  
For auld lang syne.”

“Scotch! Scotch!” cried Paulina; “papa is talking Scotch: and Scotch he is, partly. We are Home and De Bassompierre, Caledonian and Gallic.”

“And is that a Scotch reel you are dancing,

you Highland fairy?" asked her father. "Mrs. Bretton, there will be a green ring growing up in the middle of your kitchen shortly. I would not answer for her being quite cannie: she is a strange little mortal."

"Tell Lucy to dance with me, papa: there is Lucy Snowe."

Mr. Home (there was still quite as much about him of plain Mr. Home as of proud Count de Bassompierre) held his hand out to me, saying kindly, "he remembered me well; and, even had his own memory been less trustworthy, my name was so often on his daughter's lips, and he had listened to so many long tales about me, I should seem like an old acquaintance."

Every one now had tasted the wassail-cup except Paulina, whose *pas de fée, ou de fantaisie*, nobody thought of interrupting to offer so profanatory a draught; but she was not to be overlooked, nor balked of her mortal privileges.

"Let me taste," said she to Graham, as he was putting the cup on the shelf of the dresser out of her reach.

Mrs. Bretton and Mr. Home were now engaged in conversation. Dr. John had not been unob-

servant of the fairy's dance; he had watched it, and he had liked it. To say nothing of the softness and beauty of the movements, eminently grateful to his grace-loving eye, that ease in his mothers' house charmed him, for it set *him* at ease: again she seemed a child for him — again, almost his playmate. I wondered how he would speak to her; I had not yet seen him address her; his first words proved that the old days of "little Polly" had been recalled to his mind by this evening's child-like light-heartedness.

"Your ladyship wishes for the tankard?"

"I think I said so. I think I intimated as much."

"Couldn't consent to a step of the kind on any account. Sorry for it, but couldn't do it."

"Why? I am quite well now: it can't break my collar-bone again, or dislocate my shoulder. Is it wine?"

"No; nor dew."

"I don't want dew; I don't like dew: but what is it?"

"Ale—strong ale—old October; brewed, perhaps, when I was born."

"It must be curious: is it good?"

“Excessively good.”

And he took it down, administered to himself a second dose of this mighty elixir, expressed in his mischievous eyes extreme contentment with the same, and solemnly replaced the cup on the shelf.

“I should like a little,” said Paulina, looking up; “I never had any ‘old October:’ is it sweet?”

“Perilously sweet,” said Graham.

She continued to look up exactly with the countenance of a child that longs for some prohibited dainty. At last the Doctor relented, took it down, and indulged himself in the gratification of letting her taste from his hand; his eyes, always expressive in the revelation of pleasurable feelings, luminously and smilingly avowed that it *was* a gratification; and he prolonged it by so regulating the position of the cup that only a drop at a time could reach the rosy, sipping lips by which its brim was courted.

“A little more—a little more,” said she, petulantly touching his hand with her forefinger, to make him incline the cup more generously and yieldingly. “It smells of spice and sugar, but I can’t taste it; your wrist is so stiff, and you are so stingy.”

He indulged her, whispering, however, with gravity: "Don't tell my mother or Lucy; they wouldn't approve."

"Nor do I," said she, passing into another tone and manner as soon as she had fairly assayed the beverage, just as if it had acted upon her like some disenchanting draught, undoing the work of a wizard: "I find it anything but sweet; it is bitter and hot, and takes away my breath. Your old October was only desirable while forbidden. Thank you, no more."

And, with a slight bend—careless, but as graceful as her dance—she glided from him and rejoined her father.

I think she had spoken truth: the child of seven was in the girl of seventeen.

Graham looked after her a little baffled, a little puzzled; his eye was on her a good deal during the rest of the evening, but she did not seem to notice him.

As we ascended to the drawing-room for tea, she took her father's arm: her natural place seemed to be at his side; her eyes and her ears were dedicated to him. He and Mrs. Bretton were the chief talkers of our little party, and Paulina

was their best listener, attending closely to all that was said, prompting the repetition of this or that trait or adventure.

“ And where were you at such a time, papa? And what did you say then? And tell Mrs. Bretton what happened on that occasion.” Thus she drew him out.

She did not again yield to any effervescence of glee; the infantine sparkle was exhaled for the night: she was soft, thoughtful, and docile. It was pretty to see her bid good-night; her manner to Graham was touched with dignity: in her very slight smile and quiet bow spoke the Countess, and Graham could not but look grave, and bend responsive. I saw he hardly knew how to blend together in his ideas the dancing fairy and delicate dame.

Next day, when we were all assembled round the breakfast table, shivering and fresh from the morning's chill ablutions, Mrs. Bretton pronounced a decree that nobody, who was not forced by dire necessity, should quit her house that day.

Indeed, egress seemed next to impossible; the drift darkened the lower panes of the casement, and, on looking out, one saw the sky and air vexed and dim, the wind and snow in angry con-



flict. There was no fall now, but what had already descended was torn up from the earth, whirled round by brief shrieking gusts, and cast into a hundred fantastic forms.

The Countess seconded Mrs. Bretton.

"Papa shall not go out," said she, "placing a seat for herself beside her father's arm-chair. "I will look after him. You won't go into town, will you, papa?"

"Aye, and No," was the answer. "If you and Mrs. Bretton are *very* good to me, Polly—kind, you know, and attentive; if you pet me in a very nice manner, and make much of me, I may possibly be induced to wait an hour after breakfast and see whether this razor-edged wind settles. But, you see, you give me no breakfast; you offer me nothing: you let me starve."

"Quick! please, Mrs. Bretton, and pour out the coffee," entreated Paulina, "whilst I take care of the Count de Bassompierre in other respects: since he grew into a Count, he has needed so much attention."

She separated and prepared a roll.

"There, papa, are your 'pistolets' charged?" said she. "And there is some marmalade, just the same

sort of marmalade we used to have at Bretton, and which you said was as good as if it had been conserved in Scotland——”

“And which your little ladyship used to beg for my boy—do you remember that?” interposed Mrs. Bretton. “Have you forgotten how you would come to my elbow and touch my sleeve with the whisper, ‘please ma’am, something good for Graham—a little marmalade, or honey, or jam?’”

“No, mama,” broke in Dr. John, laughing, yet reddening; “it surely was not so: I could not have cared for these things.”

“Did he or did he not, Paulina?”

“He liked them,” asserted Paulina.

“Never blush for it, John,” said Mr. Home, encouragingly. “I like them myself yet, and always did. And Polly showed her sense in catering for a friend’s material comforts: it was I who put her into the way of such good manners—nor do I let her forget them. Polly, offer me a small slice of that tongue.”

“There, papa: but remember you are only waited upon with this assiduity, on condition of being persuadable, and reconciling yourself to La Terrasse for the day.”

“Mrs. Bretton,” said the Count, “I want to get rid of my daughter, to send her to school. Do you know of any good school?”

“There is Lucy’s place—Madame Beck’s.”

“Miss Snowe is in a school?”

“I am a teacher,” I said, and was rather glad of the opportunity of saying this. For a little while I had been feeling as if placed in a false position. Mrs. Bretton and son knew my circumstances; but the Count and his daughter did not. They might choose to vary by some shades their hitherto cordial manner towards me, when aware of my grade in society. I spoke then readily: but a swarm of thoughts, I had not anticipated nor invoked, rose dim at the words, making me sigh involuntarily. Mr. Home did not lift his eyes from his breakfast-plate for about two minutes, nor did he speak; perhaps he had not caught the words—perhaps he thought that on a confession of that nature, politeness would interdict comment: the Scotch are proverbially proud; and homely as was Mr. Home in look, simple in habits and tastes, I have all along intimated that he was not without his share of the national quality. Was his a pseudo pride? was it real dignity? I leave the question

undecided in its wide sense. Where it concerned me individually I can only answer: then, and always, he showed himself a true-hearted gentleman.

By nature he was a feeler and a thinker; over his emotions and his reflections spread a mellowing of melancholy; more than a mellowing: in trouble and bereavement it became a cloud. He did not know much about Lucy Snowe; what he knew, he did not very accurately comprehend: indeed his misconceptions of my character often made me smile; but he saw my walk in life lay rather on the shady side of the hill; he gave me credit for doing my endeavour to keep the course honestly straight; he would have helped me if he could: having no opportunity of helping, he still wished me well. When he did look at me, his eye was kind; when he did speak, his voice was benevolent.

“Yours,” said he, “is an arduous calling. I wish you health and strength to win in it—success.

His fair little daughter did not take the information quite so composedly: she fixed on me a pair of eyes wide with wonder—almost with dismay.

“Are you a teacher?” cried she. Then, having

paused on the unpalatable idea, "Well, I never knew what you were, nor ever thought of asking: for me, you were always Lucy Snowe."

"And what am I now?" I could not forbear inquiring.

"Yourself, of course. But do you really teach here, in Villette?"

"I really do."

"And do you like it?"

"Not always."

"And why do you go on with it?"

Her father looked at, and, I feared, was going to check her; but he only said, "Proceed, Polly, proceed with that catechism—prove yourself the little wiseacre you are. If Miss Snowe were to blush and look confused, I should have to bid you hold your tongue; and you and I would sit out the present meal in some disgrace; but she only smiles, so push her hard, multiply the cross-questions. Well, Miss Snowe, why do you go on with it?"

"Chiefly, I fear, for the sake of the money I get."

"Not then from motives of pure philanthropy? Polly and I were clinging to that hypothesis, as

the most lenient way of accounting for your eccentricity."

"No—no, sir. Rather for the roof of shelter I am thus enabled to keep over my head; and for the comfort of mind it gives me to think that while I can work for myself, I am spared the pain of being a burden to anybody."

"Papa, say what you will, I pity Lucy."

"Take up that pity, Miss de Bassompierre: take it up in both hands, as you might a little callow gosling squattering out of bounds without leave; put it back in the warm nest of a heart whence it issued, and receive in your ear this whisper. If my Polly ever came to know by experience the uncertain nature of this world's goods, I should like her to act as Lucy acts: to work for herself, that she might burden neither kith nor kin."

"Yes, papa," said she, pensively and tractably. "But poor Lucy! I thought she was a rich lady, and had rich friends."

"You thought like a little simpleton: *I* never thought so. When I had time to consider Lucy's manner and aspect, which was not often, I saw she was one who had to guard and not be guarded; to act and not be served: and this lot has, I imagine,

helped her to an experience for which, if she live long enough to realize its full benefit, she may yet bless Providence. But this school," he pursued changing his tone from grave to gay: "Would Madame Beck admit my Polly, do you think, Miss Lucy?"

I said, there needed but to try madame; it would soon be seen: she was fond of English pupils. "If you, sir," I added, "will but take Miss de Bassompierre in your carriage this very afternoon, I think I can answer for it that Rosine, the portress, will not be very slow in answering your ring; and madame, I am sure, will put on her best pair of gloves to come into the salon to receive you."

"In that case," responded Mr. Home, "I see no sort of necessity there is for delay. Mrs. Hurst can send, what she calls, her young lady's 'things' after her; Polly can settle down to her horn-book before night; and you, Miss Lucy, I trust, will not disdain to cast an occasional eye upon her, and let me know, from time to time, how she gets on. I hope you approve of the arrangement, Countess de Bassompierre?"

The Countess hemmed and hesitated. "I thought," said she, "I thought I had finished my education——"

“That only proves how much we may be mistaken in our thoughts: I hold a far different opinion, as most of those will who have been auditors of your profound knowledge of life this morning. Ah, my little girl, thou hast much to learn; and papa ought to have taught thee more than he has done! Come, there is nothing for it but to try Madame Beck; and the weather seems settling, and I have finished my breakfast——”

“But, papa!”

“Well?”

“I see an obstacle.”

“I don’t at all.”

“It is enormous, papa, it can never be got over; it is as large as you in your great coat, and the snowdrift on the top.”

“And, like that snowdrift, capable of melting?”

“No! it is of too—too solid flesh: it is just your own self. Miss Lucy, warn Madame Beck not to listen to any overtures about taking me, because, in the end, it would turn out that she would have to take papa too: as he is so teasing, I will just tell tales about him. Mrs. Bretton and all of you listen: About five years ago, when I was twelve years old, he took it into his head that he was



spoiling me; that I was growing unfitted for the world, and I don't know what, and nothing would serve or satisfy him, but I must go to school. I cried, and so on; but M. de Bassompierre proved hard-hearted, quite firm and flinty, and to school I went. What was the result? In the most admirable manner, papa came to school likewise: every other day he called to see me. Madame Aigredoux grumbled, but it was of no use; and so, at last, papa and I were both, in a manner, expelled. Lucy can just tell Madame Beck this little trait: it is only fair to let her know what she has to expect."

Mrs. Bretton asked Mr. Home what he had to say in answer to this statement. As he made no defence, judgment was given against him, and Paulina triumphed.

But she had other moods besides the arch and naïve. After breakfast, when the two elders withdrew—I suppose to talk over certain of Mrs. Bretton's business matters—and the Countess, Dr. Bretton, and I were, for a short time, alone together—all the child left her; with us, more nearly her companions in age, she rose at once to the little lady: her very face seemed to alter; that play of feature, and candour of look, which, when she

spoke to her father, made it quite dimpled and round, yielded to an aspect more thoughtful, and lines distincter and less *mobile*.

No doubt, Graham noted the change as well as I. He stood for some minutes near the window, looking out at the snow; presently he approached the hearth, and entered into conversation, but not quite with his usual ease: fit topics did not seem to rise to his lips; he chose them fastidiously, hesitatingly, and consequently infelicitously: he spoke vaguely of Villette—its inhabitants, its notable sights and buildings. He was answered by Miss de Bassompierre in quite womanly sort; with intelligence, with a manner not indeed wholly disindividualized: a tone, a glance, a gesture, here and there, rather animated and quick than measured and stately, still recalled little Polly; but yet there was so fine and even a polish, so calm and courteous a grace, gilding and sustaining these peculiarities, that a less sensitive man than Graham would not have ventured to seize upon them as vantage points, leading to franker intimacy.

Yet while Dr. Bretton continued subdued, and, for him, sedate, he was still observant. Not one of those pretty impulses and natural breaks escaped

him. He did not miss one characteristic movement, one hesitation in language, or one lisp in utterance. At times, in speaking fast, she still lisped; but coloured whenever such lapse occurred, and in a painstaking, conscientious manner, quite as amusing as the slight error, repeated the word more [distinctly].

Whenever she did this, Dr. Bretton smiled. Gradually, as they conversed, the restraint on each side slackened: might the conference have but been prolonged, I believe it would soon have become genial: already to Paulina's lip and cheek returned the wreathing, dimpling smile; she lisped once, and forgot to correct herself. And Dr. John, I know not how *he* changed, but change he did. He did not grow gayer—no raillery, no levity sparkled across his aspect—but his position seemed to become one of more pleasure to himself, and he spoke his augmented comfort in readier language, in tones more suave. Ten years ago, this pair had always found abundance to say to each other; the intervening decade had not narrowed the experience or impoverished the intelligence of either: besides, there are certain natures of which the mutual influence is such, that the more they say, the more they have

to say. For these, out of association grows adhesion, and out of adhesion, amalgamation.

Graham, however, must go : his was a profession, whose claims are neither to be ignored, nor deferred. He left the room ; but before he could leave the house there was a return. I am sure he came back—not for the paper, or card in his desk, which formed his ostensible errand—but to assure himself, by one more glance, that Paulina's aspect was really such as memory was bearing away : that he had not been viewing her somehow by a partial, artificial light, and making a fond mistake. No ! he found the impression true—rather, indeed, he gained, than lost, by this return : he took away with him a parting look—shy, but very soft—as beautiful, as innocent, as any little fawn could lift out of its cover of fern, or any lamb from its meadow-bed.

Being left alone, Paulina and I kept silence for some time ; we both took out some work, and plied a mute and diligent task. The white-wood work-box of old days, was now replaced by one inlaid with precious mosaic, and furnished with implements of gold ; the tiny and trembling fingers that could scarce guide the needle, though tiny still, were now

swift and skilful: but there was the same busy knitting of the brow, the same little dainty mannerisms, the same quick turns and movements—now to replace a stray tress; and anon to shake from the silken skirt some imaginary atom of dust—some clinging fibre of thread.

That morning I was disposed for silence: the austere fury of the winter-day, had on me an awing, hushing influence. That passion of January, so white and so bloodless, was not yet spent: the storm had raved itself hoarse, but seemed no nearer exhaustion. Had Ginevra Fanshawe been my companion in that morning-room, she would not have suffered me to muse and listened undisturbed. The presence just gone from us would have been her theme; and how she would have rung the changes on one topic! how she would have pursued and pestered me with questions and surmises—worried and oppressed me with comments and confidences I did not want, and longed to avoid.

Paulina Mary cast once or twice towards me a quiet, but penetrating glance of her dark, full eye; her lips half opened, as if to the impulse of coming utterance: but she saw and delicately respected my inclination for silence.

"This will not hold long," I thought to myself for I was not accustomed to find in women or girls any power of self-control, or strength of self-denial. As far as I knew them, the chance of a gossip about their usually trivial secrets, their often very washy and paltry feelings, was a treat not to be readily foregone.

The little Countess promised an exception: she sewed, till she was tired of sewing, and then she took a book.

As chance would have it, she had sought it in Dr. Bretton's own compartment of the book-case; and it proved to be an old Bretton book—some illustrated work of natural history. Often had I seen her standing at Graham's side, resting that volume on his knee, and reading to his tuition; and, when the lesson was over, begging, as a treat, that he would tell her all about the pictures. I watched her keenly: here was a true test of that memory she had boasted: would her recollections now be faithful?

Faithful? It could not be doubted. As she turned the leaves, over her face passed gleam after gleam of expression, the least intelligent of which was a full greeting to the Past. And then

she turned to the title-page, and looked at the name written in the schoolboy hand. She looked at it long; nor was she satisfied with merely looking: she gently passed over the characters the tips of her fingers, accompanying the action with an unconscious but tender smile, which converted the touch into a caress. Paulina loved the Past; but the peculiarity of this little scene was, that she *said* nothing: she could feel, without pouring out her feelings in a flux of words.

She now occupied herself at the bookcase for nearly an hour; taking down volume after volume, and renewing her acquaintance with each. This, done, she seated herself on a low stool, rested her cheek on her hand, and thought, and still was mute.

The sound of the front door opened below, a rush of cold wind, and her father's voice speaking to Mrs. Bretton in the hall, startled her at last. She sprang up: she was down-stairs in one second.

"Papa! papa! you are not going out?"

"My pet; I must go into town."

"But it is too—*too* cold, papa."

And then I heard M. de Bassompierre showing to her how he was well provided against the

weather; and how he was going to have the carriage, and to be quite snugly sheltered; and, in short, proving that she need not fear for his comfort.

“But you will promise to come back here this evening, before it is quite dark;—you and Dr. Bretton, both, in the carriage? It is not fit to ride.”

“Well, if I see the Doctor, I will tell him a lady has laid on him her commands to take care of his precious health, and come home early under my escort.”

“Yes, you must say a lady; and he will think it is his mother, and be obedient. And, papa, mind to come soon, for I *shall* watch and listen.”

The door closed, and the carriage rolled softly through the snow; and back returned the Countess, pensive and anxious.

She *did* listen, and watch, when evening closed; but it was in stillest sort: walking the drawing-room with quite noiseless step. She checked at intervals her velvet march; inclined her ear, and consulted the night sounds: I should rather say, the night silence; for now, at last, the wind was fallen. The sky, relieved of its avalanche, lay naked and pale: through the barren boughs of



the avenue we could see it well, and note also the polar splendour of the new-year moon—an orb, white as a world of ice. Nor was it late when we saw also the return of the carriage.

Paulina had no dance of welcome for this evening. It was with a sort of gravity that she took immediate possession of her father, as he entered the room; but she at once made him her entire property, led him to the seat of her choice, and, while softly showering round him honeyed words of commendation for being so good and coming home so soon, you would have thought it was entirely by the power of her little hands he was put into his chair, and settled and arranged; for the strong man seemed to take pleasure in wholly yielding himself to this dominion—potent only by love.

Graham did not appear till some minutes after the Count. Paulina half turned when his step was heard: they spoke, but only a word or two; their fingers met a moment, but obviously with slight contact. Paulina remained beside her father; Graham threw himself into a seat on the other side of the room.

It was well that Mrs. Bretton and Mr. Home had a great deal to say to each other—almost an inex-

haustible fund of discourse in old recollections ; otherwise, I think, our party would have been but a still one that evening.

After tea, Paulina's quick needle and pretty golden thimble were busily plied by the lamp-light, but her tongue rested, and her eyes seemed reluctant to raise often their lids so smooth and so full-fringed. Graham too must have been tired with his day's work : he listened dutifully to his elders and betters, said very little himself, and followed with his eye the gilded glance of Paulina's thimble, as if it had been some bright moth on the wing, or the golden head of some darting little yellow serpent.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## A BURIAL.

FROM this date my life did not want variety; I went out a good deal, with the entire consent of Madame Beck, who perfectly approved the grade of my acquaintance. That worthy directress had never from the first treated me otherwise than with respect; and when she found that I was liable to frequent invitations from a chateau and a great hotel, respect improved into distinction.

Not that she was fulsome about it: madame, in all things worldly, was in nothing weak; there was measure and sense in her hottest pursuit of self-interest, calm and considerateness in her closest clutch of gain; without, then, laying herself open to my contempt as a time-server and a toadie, she marked with tact that she was pleased people connected with her establishment should frequent such associates as

must cultivate and elevate, rather than those who might deteriorate and depress. She never praised either me or my friends; only once when she was sitting in the sun in the garden, a cup of coffee at her elbow and the Gazette in her hand, looking very comfortable, and I came up and asked leave of absence for the evening, she delivered herself in this gracious sort :—

“Oui, oui, ma bonne amie : je vous donne la permission de cœur et de gré. Votre travail dans ma maison a toujours été admirable, rempli de zèle et de discrétion : vous avez bien le droit de vous amuser. Sortez donc tant que vous voudrez. Quant à votre choix de connaissances, j’en suis contente ; c’est sage, digne, louable.”

She closed her lips and resumed the Gazette.

The reader will not too gravely regard the little circumstance that about this time the triply-enclosed packet of five letters temporarily disappeared from my bureau. Blank dismay was naturally my first sensation on making the discovery ; but in a moment I took heart of grace.

“Patience!” whispered I to myself. “Let me say nothing, but wait peaceably ; they will come back again.”

And they did come back: they had only been on a short visit to madame's chamber; having passed their examination, they came back duly and truly: I found them all right the next day.

I wonder what she thought of my correspondence. What estimate did she form of Dr. John Bretton's epistolary powers? In what light did the often very pithy thoughts, the generally sound, and sometimes original opinions, set, without pretension, in an easily-flowing, spirited style, appear to her? How did she like that genial, half-humorous vein, which to me gave such delight? What did she think of the few kind words scattered here and there—not thickly, as the diamonds were scattered in the valley of Sindbad, but sparely, as those gems lie in unfabled beds? Oh, Madame Beck! how seemed these things to you?

I think in Madame Beck's eyes the five letters found a certain favour. One day after she had *borrowed* them of me (in speaking of so suave a little woman, one ought to use suave terms), I caught her examining me with a steady contemplative gaze, a little puzzled, but not at all malevolent. It was during that brief space between lessons, when the pupils turned out into the court for a quarter of an

hour's recreation; she and I remained in the first class alone: when I met her eye, her thoughts forced themselves partially through her lips.

"Il y a," said she, "quelquechose de bien remarquable dans le caractère Anglais."

"How, Madame?"

She gave a little laugh, repeating the word "how" in English.

"Je ne saurais vous dire 'how;' mais, enfin, les Anglais ont des idées à eux, en amitié, en amour, en tout. Mais au moins il n'est pas besoin de les surveiller," she added, getting up and trotting away like the compact little pony she was.

"Then I hope," murmured I to myself, "you will graciously let alone my letters for the future."

Alas! something came rushing into my eyes, dimming utterly their vision, blotting from sight the schoolroom, the garden, the bright winter sun, as I remembered that never more would letters, such as she had read, come to me. I had seen the last of them. That goodly river on whose banks I had sojourned, of whose waves a few reviving drops had trickled to my lips, was bending to another course: it was leaving my little hut and field forlorn and sand-

dry, pouring its wealth of waters far away. The change was right, just, natural; not a word could be said: but I loved my Rhine, my Nile; I had almost worshipped my Ganges, and I grieved that the grand tide should roll estranged, should vanish like a false mirage. Though stoical, I was not quite a stoic; drops streamed fast on my hands, on my desk: I wept one sultry shower, heavy and brief.

But soon I said to myself, "the Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome."

Welcome I endeavoured to make it. Indeed, long pain had made patience a habit. In the end I closed the eyes of my dead, covered its face, and composed its limbs with great calm.

The letters, however, must be put away, out of sight: people who have undergone bereavement always jealously gather together and lock away mementos: it is not supportable to be stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret.

One vacant holiday afternoon (the Thursday) going to my treasure, with intent to consider its final disposal, I perceived—and this time with a strong impulse of displeasure—that it had been again

tampered with: the packet was there, indeed, but the ribbon which secured it had been untied and retied; and by other symptoms I knew that my drawer had been visited.

This was a little too much. Madame Beck herself was the soul of discretion, besides having as strong a brain and sound a judgment as ever furnished a human head; that she should know the contents of my casket, was not pleasant, but might be borne. Little Jesuit inquisitress, as she was, she could see things in a true light, and understand them in an unperverted sense; but the idea that she had ventured to communicate information, thus gained, to others; that she had, perhaps, amused herself with a companion over documents, in my eyes most sacred, shocked me cruelly. Yet, that such was the case I now saw reason to fear: I even guessed her confidant. Her kinsman, M. Paul Emanuel, had spent yesterday evening with her: she was much in the habit of consulting him, and of discussing with him matters she broached to no one else. This very morning, in class, that gentleman had favoured me with a glance, which he seemed to have borrowed from Vashti, the actress; I had not at the moment comprehended that blue, yet lurid, flash out of his



angry eye, but I read its meaning now. *He*, I believed, was not apt to regard what concerned me from a fair point of view, nor to judge me with tolerance and candour: I had always found him severe and suspicious: the thought that these letters, mere friendly letters as they were, had fallen once, and might fall again, into his hands, jarred my very soul.

What should I do to prevent this? In what corner of this strange house was it possible to find security or secrecy? Where could a key be a safeguard, or a padlock a barrier?

In the grenier? No, I did not like the grenier. Besides, most of the boxes and drawers there were mouldering, and did not lock. Rats, too, gnawed their way through the decayed wood; and mice made nests amongst the litter of their contents: my dear letters (most dear still, though Ichabod was written on their covers) might be consumed by vermin; certainly the writing would soon become obliterated by damp. No; the grenier would not do—but where then?

While pondering this problem, I sat in the dormitory window-seat. It was a fine frosty afternoon; the winter sun, already setting, gleamed pale on the

tops of the garden-shrubs in the "allée défendue." One great old pear-tree—the nun's pear-tree—stood up a tall dryad skeleton, gray, gaunt, and stripped. A thought struck me—one of those queer fantastic thoughts that will sometimes strike solitary people. I put on my bonnet, cloak and furs, and went out into the city.

Bending my steps to the old historical quarter of the town, whose hoar and overshadowed precincts I always sought by instinct in melancholy moods, I wandered on from street to street, till, having crossed a half-deserted "place" or square, I found myself before a sort of broker's shop; an ancient place, full of ancient things.

What I wanted was a metal box which might be soldered, or a thick glass jar or bottle which might be stoppered and sealed hermetically. Amongst miscellaneous heaps, I found and purchased the latter article.

I then made a little roll of my letters, wrapped them in oiled silk, bound them with twine, and, having put them in the bottle, got the old Jew broker to stopper, seal, and make it air-tight. While obeying my directions, he glanced at me now and then, suspiciously, from under his frost-white eye-

lashes. I believe he thought there was some evil deed on hand. In all this I had a dreary something—not pleasure—but a sad, lonely satisfaction. The impulse under which I acted, the mood controlling me, were similar to the impulse and the mood which had induced me to visit the confessional. With quick walking I regained the pensionnat just at dark, and in time for dinner.

At seven o'clock the moon rose. At half-past seven, when the pupils and teachers were at study, and Madame Beck was with her mother and children in the *salle à manger*, when the half-boarders were all gone home, and Rosine had left the vestibule, and all was still—I shawled myself, and, taking the sealed jar, stole out through the first-classe door, into the *berceau* and thence into the “*allée défendue*.”

Methusaleh, the pear-tree, stood at the further end of this walk, near my seat: he rose up, dim and gray, above the lower shrubs round him. Now Methusaleh, though so very old, was of sound timber still; only there was a hole, or rather a deep hollow, near his root. I knew there was such a hollow, hidden partly by ivy and creepers growing thick round; and there I meditated hiding my treasure. But I was

not only going to hide a treasure—I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping, as I wrapped it in its winding-sheet, must be interred.

Well, I cleared away the ivy, and found the hole; it was large enough to receive the jar, and I thrust it deep in. In a tool-shed at the bottom of the garden, lay the relics of building-materials, left by masons lately employed to repair a part of the premises. I fetched thence a slate and some mortar, put the slate on the hollow, secured it with cement, covered the whole with black mould, and, finally, replaced the ivy. This done, I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave.

The air of the night was very still, but dim with a peculiar mist, which changed the moonlight into a luminous haze. In this air, or this mist, there was some quality—electrical, perhaps—which acted in strange sort upon me. I felt then as I had felt a year ago in England—on a night when the aurora borealis was streaming and sweeping round heaven, when, belated in lonely fields, I had paused to watch that mustering of an army with banners—that quivering of serried lances—

that swift ascent of messengers from below the north star to the dark, high keystone of heaven's arch. I felt, not happy, far otherwise, but strong with reinforced strength.

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters—to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain. But what road was open?—what plan available?

On this question I was still pausing, when the moon, so dim hitherto, seemed to shine out somewhat brighter: a ray gleamed even white before me, and a shadow became distinct and marked. I looked more narrowly, to make out the cause of this well-defined contrast appearing a little suddenly in the obscure alley: whiter and blacker it grew on my eye: it took shape with instantaneous transformation: I stood about three yards from a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman.

Five minutes passed. I neither fled nor shrieked. She was there still. I spoke.

“Who are you? and why do you come to me?”

She stood mute. She had no face—no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me.

I felt, if not brave, yet a little desperate; and desperation will often suffice to fill the post and do the work of courage. I advanced one step. I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her. She seemed to recede. I drew nearer: her recession, still silent, became swift. A mass of shrubs, full-leaved evergreens laurel and dense yew, intervened between me and what I followed. Having passed that obstacle, I looked and saw nothing. I waited. I said,—“If you have any errand to me, come back and deliver it.” Nothing spoke or reappeared.

This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, “I have again seen the nun.”

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Paulina Mary sought my frequent presence in the Rue Cr  cy. In the old Bretton days, though she had never professed herself fond of me, my society had soon become to her a sort of unconscious necessary. I used to notice that if I withdrew to

my room, she would speedily come trotting after me, and opening the door and peeping in, say, with her little peremptory accent,—

“Come down. Why do you sit here by yourself? You must come into the parlour.”

In the same spirit she urged me now—

“Leave the Rue Fossette,” she said, “and come and live with us. Papa would give you far more than Madame Beck gives you.”

Mr. Home himself offered me a handsome sum—thrice my present salary—if I would accept the office of companion to his daughter. I declined. I think I should have declined had I been poorer than I was, and with scantier fund of resource, more stinted narrowness of future prospect. I had not that vocation. I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me. Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid’s place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence. Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts, and starved.

I was no bright lady’s shadow — not Miss de

Bassompierre's. Overcast enough it was my nature often to be; of a subdued habit I was: but the dimness and depression must both be voluntary—such as kept me docile at my desk, in the midst of my now well-accustomed pupils in Madame Beck's first classe; or alone, at my own bedside, in her dormitory, or in the alley and seat which were called mine, in her garden: my qualifications were not convertible, not adaptable; they could not be made the foil of any gem, the adjunct of any beauty, the appendage of any greatness in Christendom. Madame Beck and I, without assimilating, understood each other well. I was not *her* companion, nor her children's governess; she left me free: she tied me to nothing—not to herself—not even to her interests: once, when she had for a fortnight been called from home by a near relation's illness, and on her return, all anxious and full of care about her establishment, lest something in her absence should have gone wrong—finding that matters had proceeded much as usual, and that there was no evidence of glaring neglect—she made each of the teachers a present, in acknowledgement of steadiness. To my bedside she came at twelve o'clock at night, and told me she had no present



for me. "I must make fidelity advantageous to the St. Pierre," said she; "if I attempt to make it advantageous to you, there will arise misunderstanding between us — perhaps separation. One thing, however, I *can* do to please you—leave you alone with your liberty: c'est ce que je ferai."

She kept her word. Every slight shackle she had ever laid on me, she, from that time, with quiet hand removed. Thus I had pleasure in voluntarily respecting her rules; gratification in devoting double time, in taking double pains with the pupils she committed to my charge.

As to Mary de Bassompierre, I visited her with pleasure, though I would not live with her. My visits soon taught me that it was unlikely even my occasional and voluntary society would long be indispensable to her. M. de Bassompierre, for his part, seemed impervious to this conjecture, blind to this possibility; unconscious as any child to the signs, the likelihoods, the fitful beginnings of what, when it drew to an end, he might not approve.

Whether or not, he would cordially approve, I used to speculate. Difficult to say. He was much taken up with scientific interests; keen, intent, and somewhat oppugnant in what concerned his fa-

yourite pursuits, but unsuspicious and trustful in the ordinary affairs of life. From all I could gather, he seemed to regard his "daughterling" as still but a child, and probably had not yet admitted the notion that others might look on her in a different light: he would speak of what should be done when "Polly" was a woman, when she should be grown up; and "Polly," standing beside his chair, would sometimes smile and take his honoured head between her little hands, and kiss his iron-gray locks; and, at other times, she would pout and toss her curls: but she never said, "Papa, I *am* grown up."

She had different moods for different people. With her father she really was still a child, or child-like, affectionate, merry, and playful. With me she was serious, and as womanly as thought and feeling could make her. With Mrs. Bretton she was docile and reliant, but not expansive. With Graham she was shy, at present very shy; at moments she tried to be cold; on occasion she endeavoured to shun him. His step made her start; his entrance hushed her; when he spoke, her answers failed of fluency; when he took leave, she remained self-vexed and disconcerted. Even her father noticed this demeanour in her.

“ My little Polly,” he said once, “ you live too retired a life; if you grow to be a woman with these shy manners, you will hardly be fitted for society. You really make quite a stranger of Dr. Bretton: how is this? Don’t you remember that, as a little girl, you used to be rather partial to him.”

“ *Rather*, papa,” echoed she, with her slightly dry, yet gentle and simple tone.

“ And you don’t like him now? What has he done?”

“ Nothing. Y-e-s, I like him a little; but we are grown strange to each other.”

“ Then rub it off, Polly: rub the rust and the strangeness off. Talk away when he is here, and have no fear of him!”

“ *He* does not talk much. Is he afraid of me, do you think, papa?”

“ Oh, to be sure! What man would not be afraid of such a little silent lady?”

“ Then tell him some day not to mind my being silent. Say that it is my way, and that I have no unfriendly intention.”

“ Your way, you little chatter-box? So far from being your way, it is only your whim!”

“ Well, I’ll improve, papa.”

And very pretty was the grace with which, the next day, she tried to keep her word. I saw her make the effort to converse affably with Dr. John on general topics. The attention called into her guest’s face a pleasurable glow; he met her with caution, and replied to her in his softest tones, as if there was a kind of gossamer happiness hanging in the air which he feared to disturb by drawing too deep a breath. Certainly, in her timid yet earnest advance to friendship, it could not be denied that there was a most exquisite and fairy charm.

When the Doctor was gone, she approached her father’s chair.

“ Did I keep my word, papa? Did I behave better?”

“ My Polly behaved like a queen. I shall become quite proud of her if this improvement continues. By and by we shall see her receiving my guests with quite a calm, grand manner. Miss Lucy and I will have to look about us, and polish up all our best airs and graces lest we should be thrown into the shade. Still, Polly, there is a little flutter, a little tendency to stammer now

and then, and even to lisp as you lisped when you were six years old."

"No, papa," interrupted she, indignantly, "that can't be true."

"I appeal to Miss Lucy. Did she not, in answering Dr. Bretton's question as to whether she had ever seen the palace of the Prince of Bois l'Etang, say 'yeth,' she had been there 'theveral' times."

"Papa, you are satirical, you are méchant! I can pronounce all the letters of the alphabet as clearly as you can. But tell me this: you are very particular in making me be civil to Dr. Bretton, do you like him yourself?"

"To be sure: for old acquaintance sake I like him: then he is a very good son to his mother; besides being a kind-hearted fellow and clever in his profession: yes, the callant is well enough."

"*Callant!* Ah, Scotchman! Papa, is it the Edinburgh or the Aberdeen accent you have?"

"Both, my pet, both; and doubtless the Glaswegian into the bargain: it is that which enables me to speak French so well: a gude Scots tongue always succeeds well at the French."

"*The French!* Scotch again: incorrigible, papa! You, too, need schooling."

“Well, Polly, you must persuade Miss Snowe to undertake both you and me; to make you steady and womanly, and me refined and classical.”

The light in which M. de Bassompierre evidently regarded “Miss Snowe,” used to occasion me much inward edification. What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all. If any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary.

As I would not be Paulina’s nominal and paid companion, genial and harmonious as I began to find her intercourse, she persuaded me to join her in some study, as a regular and settled means of sustaining communication: she proposed the German language, which, like myself, she found difficult of

mastery. We agreed to take our lessons in the Rue Cr  cy of the same mistress; this arrangement threw us together for some hours of every week. M. de Bassompierre seemed quite pleased: it perfectly met his approbation that Madame Minerva Gravity should associate a portion of her leisure with that of his fair and dear child.

That other self-elected judge of mine, the professor in the Rue Fossette, discovering by some surreptitious, spying means, that I was no longer so stationary as hitherto, but went out regularly at certain hours of certain days, took it upon himself to place me under surveillance. People said M. Emanuel had been brought up amongst Jesuits. I should more readily have accredited this report had his man  uvres been better masked. As it was I doubted it. Never was a more undisguised schemer, a franker, looser intriguer. He would analyze his own machinations: elaborately contrive plots, and forthwith indulge in explanatory boasts of their skill. I know not whether I was more amused or provoked, by his stepping up to me one morning and whispering solemnly that he "had his eye on me: *he* at least would discharge the duty of a friend and not leave me entirely to my own devices. My pro-

ceedings seemed at present very unsettled: he did not know what to make of them: he thought his cousin Beck very much to blame in suffering this sort of fluttering inconsistency in a teacher attached to her house. What had a person devoted to a serious calling, that of education, to do with Counts and Countesses, hotels and chateaux? To him, I seemed altogether ‘*en l’air*.’ On his faith, he believed I went out six days in the seven.”

I said, “Monsieur exaggerated. I certainly had enjoyed the advantage of a little change lately, but not before it had become necessary; and the privilege was by no means exercised in excess.”

“Necessary! How was it necessary? I was well enough, he supposed? Change necessary! He would recommend me to look at the Catholic ‘*religieuses*,’ and study *their* lives. *They* asked no change.”

I am no judge of what expression crossed my face when he thus spoke, but it was one which provoked him: he accused me of being reckless, worldly, and epicurean; ambitious of greatness and feverishly athirst for the pomps and vanities of life. It seems I had no “*dévouement*,” no “*recueillement*” in my character; no spirit of grace, faith, sacrifice, or self-abasement. Feeling the inutility of answering these



charges, I mutely continued the correction of a pile of English exercises.

“ He could see in me nothing Christian: like many other Protestants, I revelled in the pride and self-will of paganism.”

I slightly turned from him, nestling still closer under the wing of silence.

A vague sound grumbled between his teeth; it could not surely be a “juron:” he was too religious for that; but I am certain I heard the word *sacré*. Grievous to relate, the same word was repeated, with the unequivocal addition of *mille* something, when I passed him about two hours afterwards in the corridor, prepared to go and take my German lesson in the Rue Crécy. Never was a better little man, in some points, than M. Paul: never, in others, a more waspish little despot.

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Our German mistress, Fraülein Anna Braun, was a worthy, hearty woman, of about forty-five; she ought, perhaps, to have lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth, as she habitually consumed, for her first and second breakfasts, beer and beef: also, her direct and downright Deutsch nature seemed to

suffer a sensation of cruel restraint from what she called our English reserve; though we thought we were very cordial with her: but we did not slap her on the shoulder, and if we consented to kiss her cheek, it was done quietly, and without any explosive smack. These omissions oppressed and depressed her considerably; still, on the whole, we got on very well. Accustomed to instruct foreign girls, who hardly ever will think and study for themselves—who have no idea of grappling with a difficulty, and overcoming it by dint of reflection or application—our progress, which, in truth, was very leisurely, seemed to astound her. In her eyes, we were a pair of glacial prodigies, cold, proud, and preternatural.

The young Countess *was* a little proud, a little fastidious: and perhaps, with her native delicacy and beauty, she had a right to these feelings; but I think it was a total mistake to ascribe them to me. I never evaded the morning salute, which Paulina would slip when she could; nor was a certain little manner of still disdain a weapon known in my armoury of defence; whereas, Paulina always kept it clear, fine and bright, and any rough German sally called forth at once its steely glisten.

Honest Anna Braun, in some measure, felt this difference; and while she half-feared, half-worshipped Paulina, as a sort of dainty nymph—an Undine—she took refuge with me, as a being all mortal, and of easier mood.

A book we liked well to read and translate was Schiller's Ballads; Paulina soon learned to read them beautifully: the *Fraülein* would listen to her with a broad smile of pleasure, and say her voice sounded like music. She translated them too with a facile flow of language, and in a strain of kindred and poetic fervour: her cheek would flush, her lips tremblingly smile, her beauteous eyes kindle or melt as she went on. She learnt the best by heart, and would often recite them when we were alone together. One she liked well was "*Des Mädchens Klage*:" that is, she liked well to repeat the words, she found plaintive melody in the sound; the sense she would criticise. She murmured, as we sat over the fire one evening:—

"Du Heilige, rufe dein kind zurück,  
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,  
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!"

"Lived and loved!" said she, "is that the

summit of earthly happiness, the end of life—to love? I don't think it is. It may be the extreme of mortal misery, it may be sheer waste of time, and fruitless torture of feeling. If Schiller had said to *be* loved—he might have come nearer the truth. Is not that another thing, Lucy, to be loved?

“I suppose it may be: but why consider the subject? What is love to you? What do you know about it?”

She crimsoned, half in irritation, half in shame.

“Now, Lucy,” she said, “I won't take that from you. It may be well for papa to look on me as a baby: I rather prefer that he should thus view me; but *you* know and shall learn to acknowledge that I am verging on my nineteenth year.”

“No matter if it were your twenty-ninth; we will anticipate no feelings by discussion and conversation: we will not talk about love.”

“Indeed, indeed!” said she—all in hurry and heat—“you may think to check and hold me in, as much as you please; but I *have* talked about it, and heard about it too, and a great deal and lately, and disagreeably and detrimentally: and in a way you wouldn't approve.”

And the vexed, triumphant, pretty, naughty

being laughed. I could not discern what she meant, and I would not ask her : I was nonplussed. Seeing, however, the utmost innocence in her countenance—combined with some transient perverseness and petulance—I said at last,—

“ Who talks to you disagreeably and detrimentally on such matters? Who that has near access to you would dare to do it? ”

“ Lucy,” replied she more softly, “ it is a person who makes me miserable sometimes ; and I wish she would keep away—I don’t want her.”

“ But who, Paulina, can it be? You puzzle me much.”

“ It is—it is my cousin Ginevra. Every time she has leave to visit Mrs. Cholmondeley she calls here, and whenever she finds me alone she begins to talk about her admirers. Love, indeed! You should hear all she has to say about love.”

“ Oh, I have heard it,” said I, quite coolly ; “ and on the whole, perhaps, it is as well you should have heard it too: it is not to be regretted, it is all right. Yet surely, Ginevra’s mind cannot influence yours. You can look over both her head and her heart.”

“ She does influence me very much. She has the art of disturbing my happiness and unsettling my

opinions. She hurts me through the feelings and people dearest to me."

"What does she say, Paulina? Give me some idea. There may be counteraction of the damage done."

"The people I have longest and most esteemed are degraded by her. She does not spare Mrs. Bretton—she does not spare . . . . Graham."

"No, I dare say: and how does she mix up these with her sentiment and her . . . . *love*? She does mix them, I suppose?"

"Lucy, she is insolent; and I believe, false. You know Dr. Bretton. We both know him. He may be careless and proud; but when was he ever mean or slavish? Day after day she shows him to me kneeling at her feet, pursuing her like her shadow. She—repulsing him with insult, and he imploring her with infatuation. Lucy, is it true? Is any of it true?"

"It may be true that he once thought her handsome: does she give him out as still her suitor?"

"She says she might marry him any day: he only waits her consent."

"It is these tales which have caused that reserve in your manner towards Graham which your father noticed."

“ They have certainly made me all doubtful about his character. As Ginevra speaks, they do not carry with them the sound of unmixed truth: I believe she exaggerates—perhaps invents—but I want to know how far.”

“ Suppose we bring Miss Fanshawe to some proof. Give her an opportunity of displaying the power she boasts.”

“ I could do that to-morrow. Papa has asked some gentlemen to dinner, all savants. Graham who, papa is beginning to discover, is a savant, too—skilled, they say, in more than one branch of science—is among the number. Now I should be miserable to sit at table unsupported, amidst such a party. I could not talk to Messieurs A—— and Z——, the Parisian academicians: all my new credit for manner would be put in peril. You and Mrs. Bretton must come for my sake; Ginevra, at a word, will join you.”

“ Yes; then I will carry a message of invitation, and she shall have the chance of justifying her character for veracity.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE HOTEL CRÉCY.

THE morrow turned out a more lively and busy day than we—or than I, at least—had anticipated. It seems it was the birthday of one of the young princes of Labassecour—the eldest, I think, the Duc de Dindonneaux—and a general holiday was given in his honour at the schools, and especially at the principal “Athénée,” or college. The youth of that institution had also concocted, and were to present a loyal address; for which purpose they were to be assembled in the public building where the yearly examinations were conducted, and the prizes distributed. After the ceremony of presentation, an oration, or “discours” was to follow from one of the professors.

Several of M. de Bassompierre’s friends—the savants—being more or less connected with the



Athénée, they were expected to attend on this occasion; together with the worshipful municipality of Villette, M. le Chevalier Staas, the burgo-master, and the parents and kinsfolk of the Athenians in general. M. de Bassompierre was engaged by his friends to accompany them; his fair daughter would, of course, be of the party, and she wrote a little note to Ginevra and myself, bidding us come early that we might join her.

As Miss Fanshawe and I were dressing in the dormitory of the Rue Fossette, she (Miss F.) suddenly burst into a laugh.

"What now?" I asked; for she had suspended the operation of arranging her attire, and was gazing at me.

"It seems so odd," she replied, with her usual half-honest, half-insolent unreserve, "that you and I should now be so much on a level, visiting in the same sphere; having the same connections."

"Why yes," said I; "I had not much respect for the connections you chiefly frequented awhile ago: Mrs. Cholmondeley and Co. would never have suited me at all."

"Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?" she inquired, in

a tone of such undisguised and unsophisticated curiosity, as made me laugh in my turn.

“ You used to call yourself a nursery-governess ; when you first came here you really had the care of the children in this house : I have seen you carry little Georgette in your arms, like a *bonne*—few governesses would have condescended so far—and now Madame Beck treats you with more courtesy than she treats the *Parisienne*, St. Pierre ; and that proud chit, my cousin, makes you her bosom friend ! ”

“ Wonderful ! ” I agreed, much amused at her mystification. “ Who am I indeed ? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don’t look the character.”

“ I wonder you are not more flattered by all this,” she went on : “ you take it with strange composure. If you really are the nobody I once thought you, you must be a cool hand.”

“ The nobody you once thought me ! ” I repeated, and my face grew a little hot ; but I would not be angry : of what importance was a school-girl’s crude use of the terms nobody and somebody ? I confined myself, therefore, to the remark that I had merely met with civility ; and asked “ what she saw

in civility to throw the recipient into a fever of confusion?"

"One can't help wondering at some things," she persisted.

"Wondering at marvels of your own manufacture. Are you ready at last?"

"Yes; let me take your arm."

"I would rather not: we will walk side by side."

When she took my arm, she always leaned upon me her whole weight; and, as I was not a gentleman, or her lover, I did not like it.

"There, again!" she cried. "I thought, by offering to take your arm, to intimate approbation of your dress and general appearance: I meant it as a compliment."

"You did? You meant, in short, to express that you are not ashamed to be seen in the street with me? That if Mrs. Cholmondeley should be fondling her lap-dog at some window, or Colonel de Hamal picking his teeth in a balcony, and should catch a glimpse of us, you would not quite blush for your companion?"

"Yes," said she, with that directness which was her best point—which gave an honest plainness to

her very fibs when she told them—which was, in short, the salt, the sole preservative ingredient of a character otherwise not formed to keep.

I delegated the trouble of commenting on this “yes” to my countenance; or rather, my under-lip voluntarily anticipated my tongue: of course, reverence and solemnity were not the feelings expressed in the look I gave her.

“Scornful, sneering creature!” she went on, as we crossed a great square, and entered the quiet, pleasant park, our nearest way to the Rue Cr  cy. “Nobody in this world was ever such a Turk to me as you are!”

“You bring it on yourself: let me alone: have the sense to be quiet: I will let you alone.”

“As if one *could* let you alone, when you are so peculiar and so mysterious!”

“The mystery and peculiarity being entirely the conception of your own brain—maggots—neither more nor less, be so good as to keep them out of my sight.”

“But *are* you anybody?” persevered she, pushing her hand, in spite of me, under my arm; and that arm pressed itself with inhospitable closeness against my side, by way of keeping out the intruder.

“Yes,” I said, “I am a rising character: once an old lady’s companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher.”

“Do—*do* tell me who you are? I’ll not repeat it,” she urged, adhering with ludicrous tenacity to the wise notion of an incognito she had got hold of; and she squeezed the arm of which she had now obtained full possession, and coaxed and conjured till I was obliged to pause in the park to laugh. Throughout our walk she rang the most fanciful changes on this theme; proving, by her obstinate credulity, or incredulity, her incapacity to conceive how any person not bolstered up by birth or wealth, not supported by some consciousness of name or connection, could maintain an attitude of reasonable integrity. As for me, it quite sufficed to my mental tranquillity that I was known where it imported that known I should be; the rest sat on me easily: pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition, occupied about the same space and place in my interests and thoughts; they were my third class lodgers—to whom could be assigned only the small sitting-room and the little back bed-room: even if the dining and drawing-rooms stood empty, I never confessed it to them, as think-

ing minor accommodations better suited to their circumstances. The world, I soon learned, held a different estimate: and I make no doubt, the world is very right in its view, yet believe also that I am not quite wrong in mine.

There are people whom a lowered position degrades morally, to whom loss of connection costs loss of self-respect: are not these justified in placing the highest value on that station and association which is their safeguard from debasement? If a man feels that he would become contemptible in his own eyes were it generally known that his ancestry were simple and not gentle, poor and not rich, workers and not capitalists, would it be right severely to blame him for keeping these fatal facts out of sight—for starting, trembling, quailing at the chance which threatens exposure? The longer we live, the more our experience widens; the less prone are we to judge our neighbour's conduct, to question the world's wisdom: wherever an accumulation of small defences is found, whether surrounding the prude's virtue or the man of the world's respectability, there, be sure, it is needed.

We reached the Hotel Crécy; Paulina was ready; Mrs. Bretton was with her; and, under her escort

and that of M. de Bassompierre, we were soon conducted to the place of assembly, and seated in good seats, at a convenient distance from the Tribune. The youth of the Athénée were marshalled before us, the municipality and their bourgmestre were in places of honour, the young princes, with their tutors, occupied a conspicuous position, and the body of the building was crowded with the aristocracy and first burghers of the town.

Concerning the identity of the professor by whom the "discours" was to be delivered, I had as yet entertained neither care nor question. Some vague expectation I had that a savant would stand up and deliver a formal speech, half dogmatism to the Athenians, half-flattery to the princes.

The Tribune was yet empty when we entered, but in ten minutes after it was filled; suddenly, in a second of time, a head, chest and arms, grew above the crimson desk. This head I knew: its colour, shape, port, expression, were familiar both to me and Miss Fanshawe; the blackness and closeness of cranium, the amplitude and paleness of brow, the blueness and fire of glance, were details so domesticated in the memory, and so knit with many a whimsical association, as almost by this their sud-

den apparition, to tickle fancy to a laugh. Indeed, I confess, for my part, I did laugh till I was warm ; but then I bent my head, and made my handkerchief and a lowered veil the sole confidants of my mirth.

I think I was glad to see M. Paul ; I think it was rather pleasant than otherwise, to behold him set up there, fierce and frank, dark and candid, testy and fearless, as when regnant on his estrade in class. His presence was such a surprise : I had not once thought of expecting him, though I knew he filled the chair of Belles Lettres in the college. With *him* in that Tribune, I felt sure that neither formalism nor flattery would be our doom ; but for what was vouchsafed us, for what was poured suddenly, rapidly, continuously, on our heads—I own I was not prepared.

He spoke to the princes, the nobles, the magistrates and the burghers, with just the same ease, with almost the same pointed, choleric earnestness, with which he was wont to harangue the three divisions of the Rue Fossette. The collegians he addressed, not as school-boys, but as future citizens and embryo patriots. The times which have since come on Europe had not been foretold yet, and M.



Emanuel's spirit seemed new to me. Who would have thought the flat and fat soil of Labassecour could yield political convictions and national feelings, such as were now strongly expressed? Of the bearing of his opinions I need here give no special indication; yet it may be permitted me to say that I believed the little man not more earnest than right in what he said: with all his fire he was severe and sensible; he trampled Utopian theories under his heel; he rejected wild dreams with scorn;—but, when he looked in the face of tyranny—oh, then there opened a light in his eye worth seeing; and when he spoke of injustice, his voice gave no uncertain sound, but reminded me rather of the band-trumpet, ringing at twilight from the park.

I do not think his audience were generally susceptible of sharing his flame in its purity; but some of the college youth caught fire as he eloquently told them what should be their path and endeavour in their country's and in Europe's future. They gave him a long, loud, ringing cheer, as he concluded: with all his fierceness, he was their favourite professor.

As our party left the Hall, he stood at the entrance; he saw and knew me, and lifted his hat;

he offered his hand in passing, and uttered the words "Que 'en dites vous?"—question eminently characteristic, and reminding me, even in this his moment of triumph, of that inquisitive restlessness, that absence of what I considered desirable self-control, which were amongst his faults. He should not have cared just then to ask what I thought, or what anybody thought; but he *did* care, and he was too natural to conceal, too impulsive to repress his wish. Well! if I blamed his over-eagerness, I liked his *naïvete*. I would have praised him: I had plenty of praise in my heart; but, alas! no words on my lips. Who *has* words at the right moment? I stammered some lame expressions; but was truly glad when other people, coming up with profuse congratulations, covered my deficiency by their redundancy.

A gentleman introduced him to M. de Bassompierre; and the Count, who had likewise been highly gratified, asked him to join his friends (for the most part M. Emanuel's likewise), and to dine with them at the Hotel Crécy. He declined dinner, for he was a man always somewhat shy in meeting the advances of the wealthy: there was a strength of sturdy independence in the stringing of his sinews—

not obtrusive, but pleasant enough to discover as one advanced in knowledge of his character; he promised, however, to step in with his friend, M. A——, a French Academician, in the course of the evening.

At dinner that day, Ginevra and Paulina each looked, in her own way, very beautiful; the former, perhaps, boasted the advantage in material charms, but the latter shone pre-eminent for attractions more subtle and spiritual: for light and eloquence of eye, for grace of mien, for winning variety of expression. Ginevra's dress of deep crimson relieved well her light curls, and harmonized with her rose-like bloom. Paulina's attire—in fashion close, though faultlessly neat, but in texture clear and white—made the eye grateful for the delicate life of her complexion, for the soft animation of her countenance, for the tender depth of her eyes, for the brown shadow and bounteous flow of her hair—darker than that of her Saxon cousin, as were also her eyebrows, her eye-lashes, her full irids, and large mobile pupils. Nature having traced all these details slightly, and with a careless hand, in Miss Fanshawe's case; and in Miss de Bassompierre's, wrought them to a high and delicate finish.

Paulina was awed by the savants, but not quite to mutism : she conversed modestly, diffidently ; not without effort, but with so true a sweetness, so fine and penetrating a sense, that her father more than once suspended his own discourse to listen, and fixed on her an eye of proud delight. It was a polite Frenchman, M. Z——, a very learned, but quite a courtly man, who had drawn her into discourse. I was charmed with her French ; it was faultless—the structure correct, the idioms true, the accent pure ; Ginevra, who had lived half her life on the Continent, could do nothing like it : not that words ever failed Miss Fanshawe, but real accuracy and purity she neither possessed, nor in any number of years would acquire. Here, too, M. de Bassompierre was gratified ; for, on the point of language, he was critical.

Another listener and observer there was ; one who, detained by some exigency of his profession, had come in late to dinner. Both ladies were quietly scanned by Dr. Bretton, at the moment of taking his seat at the table ; and that guarded survey was more than once renewed. His arrival roused Miss Fanshawe, who had hitherto appeared listless : she now became smiling and complacent, talked—

though what she said was rarely to the purpose—or rather, was of a purpose somewhat mortifyingly below the standard of the occasion. Her light, disconnected prattle might have gratified Graham once; perhaps it pleased him still: perhaps it was only fancy which suggested the thought that, while his eye was filled and his ear fed, his taste, his keen zest, his lively intelligence, were not equally consulted and regaled. It is certain that, restless and exacting as seemed the demand on his attention, he yielded courteously all that was required: his manner showed neither pique nor coolness: Ginevra was his neighbour, and to her, during dinner, he almost exclusively confined his notice. She appeared satisfied, and passed to the drawing-room in very good spirits.

Yet, no sooner had we reached that place of refuge, than she again became flat and listless: throwing herself on a couch, she denounced both the “discours” and the dinner as stupid affairs, and inquired of her cousin how she could hear such a set of prosaic “gros-bonnets” as her father gathered about him. The moment the gentlemen were heard to move, her railings ceased: she started up, flew to the piano, and dashed at it with spirit. Dr. Bretton

entering, one of the first, took up his station beside her. I thought he would not long maintain that post: there was a position near the hearth to which I expected to see him attracted: this position he only scanned with his eye; while *he* looked, others drew in. The grace and mind of Paulina charmed these thoughtful Frenchmen: the fineness of her beauty, the soft courtesy of her manner, her immaturity, but real and inbred tact, pleased their national taste; they clustered about her, not indeed to talk science, which would have rendered her dumb, but to touch on many subjects in letters, in arts, in actual life, on which it soon appeared that she had both read and reflected. I listened. I am sure that though Graham stood aloof, he listened too: his hearing as well as his vision was very fine, quick, discriminating. I knew he gathered the conversation; I felt that the mode in which it was sustained suited him exquisitely — pleased him almost to pain.

In Paulina there was more force, both of feeling and character, than most people thought — than Graham himself imagined — than she would ever show to those who did not wish to see it. To speak truth, reader, there is no excellent beauty, no

accomplished grace, no reliable refinement, without strength as excellent, as complete, as trustworthy. As well might you look for good fruit and blossom on a rootless and sapless tree, as for charms that will endure in a feeble and relaxed nature. For a little while, the blooming semblance of beauty may flourish round weakness; but it cannot bear a blast: it soon fades, even in serenest sunshine. Graham would have started had any suggestive spirit whispered of the sinew and the stamina sustaining that delicate nature; but I, who had known her as a child, knew, or guessed, by what a good and strong root her graces held to the firm soil of reality.

While Dr. Bretton listened, and waited an opening in the magic circle, his glance, restlessly sweeping the room at intervals, lighted by chance on me; where I sat in a quiet nook not far from my godmother and M. de Bassompierre, who, as usual, were engaged in what Mr. Home called "a two-handed crack:" what the Count would have interpreted as a *tête-à-tête*. Graham smiled recognition, crossed the room, asked me how I was, told me I looked pale. I also had my own smile at my own thought: it was now about three months since Dr. John had spoken to me—a lapse of which he

was not even conscious. He sat down, and became silent. His wish was rather to look than converse. Ginevra and Paulina were now opposite to him : he could gaze his fill : he surveyed both forms—studied both faces.

Several new guests, ladies as well as gentlemen, had entered the room since dinner, dropping in for the evening conversation ; and amongst the gentlemen, I may incidentally observe, I had already noticed by glimpses, a severe, dark professoral outline, hovering aloof in an inner saloon, seen only in vista. M. Emanuel knew many of the gentlemen present, but I think was a stranger to most of the ladies, excepting myself ; in looking towards the hearth, he could not but see me, and naturally made a movement to approach ; seeing, however, Dr. Bretton also, he changed his mind and held back. If that had been all, there would have been no cause for quarrel ; but not satisfied with holding back, he puckered up his eye-brows, protruded his lip, and looked so ugly that I averted my eyes from the displeasing spectacle. M. Joseph Emanuel had arrived, as well as his austere brother, and at this very moment was relieving Ginevra at the piano. What a master-touch succeeded her school-girl jingle ! In



what grand, grateful tones the instrument acknowledged the hand of the true artist !

“Lucy,” began Dr. Bretton, breaking silence and smiling, as Ginevra glided before him, casting a glance as she passed by, “Miss Fanshawe is certainly a fine girl.”

Of course I assented.

“Is there,” he pursued, “another in the room as lovely ?”

“I think there is not another as handsome.”

“I agree with you, Lucy : you and I do often agree in opinion, in taste, I think ; or at least in judgment.”

“Do we ?” I said, somewhat doubtfully.

“I believe if you had been a boy, Lucy, instead of a girl—my mother’s god-son instead of her god-daughter—we should have been good friends : our opinions would have melted into each other.”

He had assumed a bantering air : a light, half-caressing half-ironic, shone aslant in his eye. Ah, Graham ! I have given more than one solitary moment to thoughts and calculations of your estimate of Lucy Snowe : was it always kind or just ? Had Lucy been intrinsically the same, but possessing the additional advantages of wealth and station, would

your manner to her, your value for her have been quite what they actually were? And yet by these questions I would not seriously infer blame. No; you might sadden and trouble me sometimes; but then mine was a soon-depressed, an easily-deranged temperament—it fell if a cloud crossed the sun. Perhaps before the eye of severe equity, I should stand more at fault than you.

Trying then to keep down the unreasonable pain which thrilled my heart, on thus being made to feel that while Graham could devote to others the most grave and earnest, the manliest interest, he had no more than light raillery for Lucy, the friend of lang syne, I inquired calmly,—

“On what points are we so closely in accordance?”

“We each have an observant faculty. You, perhaps, don’t give me credit for the possession; yet I have it.”

“But you were speaking of tastes: we may see the same objects, yet estimate them differently?”

“Let us bring it to the test. Of course, you cannot but render homage to the merits of Miss Fanshawe: now, what do you think of others in the room?—my mother, for instance; or the lions,

yonder, Messieurs A—— and Z——; or, let us say, that pale little lady, Miss de Bassompierre?"

"You know what I think of your mother. I have not thought of Messieurs A—— and Z——."

"And the other?"

"I think she is, as you say, a pale little lady—pale, certainly, just now, when she is fatigued with over-excitement."

"You don't remember her as a child?"

"I wonder, sometimes, whether you do?"

"I had forgotten her; but it is noticeable, that circumstances, persons, even words and looks, that had slipped your memory, may, under certain conditions, certain aspects of your own or another's mind, revive."

"That is possible enough."

"Yet," he continued, "the revival is imperfect—needs confirmation, partakes so much of the dim character of a dream, or of the airy one of a fancy, that the testimony of a witness becomes necessary for corroboration. Were you not a guest at Bretton ten years ago, when Mr. Home brought his little girl, whom we then called 'little Polly,' to stay with mama?"

"I was there the night she came, and also the morning she went away."

“Rather a peculiar child; was she not? I wonder how I treated her. Was I fond of children in those days? Was there anything gracious or kindly about me—great, reckless, school-boy as I was? But you don’t recollect me, of course?”

“You have seen your own picture at La Terrasse. It is like you personally. In manner, you were almost the same yesterday as to-day.”

“But, Lucy, how is that? Such an oracle really whets my curiosity. What am I to-day? What was I the yesterday of ten years back?”

“Gracious to whatever pleased you—unkindly or cruel to nothing.”

“There you are wrong; I think I was almost a brute to *you*, for instance.”

“A brute! No, Graham: I should never have patiently endured brutality.”

“*This*, however, I *do* remember: quiet Lucy Snowe tasted nothing of my grace.”

“As little of your cruelty.”

“Why, had I been Nero himself, I could not have tormented a being inoffensive as a shadow.”

“I smiled; but I also hushed a groan. Oh!—I wished he would just let me alone—cease allusion to me. These epithets—these attributes I put from

me. His "quiet Lucy Snowe," his "inoffensive shadow," I gave him back; not with scorn, but with extreme weariness: theirs was the coldness and the pressure of lead; let him whelm me with no such weight. Happily, he was soon on another theme.

"On what terms were 'little Polly' and I? Unless my recollections deceive me, we were not foes——"

"You speak very vaguely. Do you think little Polly's memory not more definite?"

"Oh! we don't talk of 'little Polly' *now*. Pray say, Miss de Bassompierre; and, of course, such a stately personage remembers nothing of Bretton. Look at her large eyes, Lucy; can they read a word in the page of memory? Are they the same which I used to direct to a horn-book? She does not know that I partly taught her to read."

"In the Bible on Sunday nights?"

"She has a calm, delicate, rather fine profile now: once what a little restless, anxious countenance was hers! What a thing is a child's preference—what a bubble! Would you believe it? that lady was fond of me!"

"I think she was in some measure, fond of you," said I, moderately.

“ You don’t remember then? *I* had forgotten; but I remember *now*. She liked me the best of whatever there was at Bretton.”

“ You thought so.”

“ I quite well recall it. I wish I could tell her all I recall; or rather, I wish some one, *you* for instance, would go behind and whisper it all in her ear, and I could have the delight—here, as I sit—of watching her look under the intelligence. Could you manage that, think you, Lucy, and make me ever grateful?”

“ Could I manage to make you ever grateful?” said I. “ No, *I could not*.” And I felt my fingers work and my hands interlock: I felt, too, an inward courage, warm and resistant. In this matter I was not disposed to gratify Dr. John: not at all. With now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a rôle not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke. Leaning towards me coaxingly, he said, softly, “ *Do* content me, Lucy.”

And I would have contented, or, at least, I would

clearly have enlightened him, and taught him well never again to expect of me the part of officious soubrette in a love drama; when, following his soft, eager murmur, meeting almost his pleading, mellow—"Do content me, Lucy!"—a sharp hiss pierced my ear on the other side.

"Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette!" sibilated the sudden boa-constrictor; "vous avez l'air bien triste, soumise, rêveuse, mais vous ne l'êtes pas; c'est moi qui vous le dis: Sauvage! la flamme à l'âme, l'éclair aux yeux!"

"Oui; j'ai la flamme à l'âme, et je dois l'avoir!" retorted I, turning in just wrath; but Professor Emanuel had hissed his insult and was gone.

The worst of the matter was, that Dr. Bretton, whose ears, as I have said, were quick and fine, caught every word of this apostrophe; he put his handkerchief to his face and laughed till he shook.

"Well done, Lucy," cried he; "capital! petite chatte, petite coquette! Oh, I must tell my mother! Is it true, Lucy, or half-true? I believe it is: you redden to the colour of Miss Fanshawe's gown. And really, by my word, now I examine him, that is the same little man who was so savage with you at the concert: the very same, and in his soul he

is frantic at this moment because he sees me laughing. Oh! I must tease him."

And Graham, yielding to his bent for mischief, laughed, jested, and whispered on till I could bear no more, and my eyes filled.

Suddenly he was sobered: a vacant space appeared near Miss de Bassompierre; the circle surrounding her seemed about to dissolve. This movement was instantly caught by Graham's eye—ever-vigilant, even while laughing; he rose, took his courage in both hands, crossed the room, and made the advantage his own. Dr. John, throughout his whole life, was a man of luck—a man of success. And why? Because he had the eye to see his opportunity, the heart to prompt to well-timed action, the nerve to consummate a perfect work. And no tyrant-passion dragged him back; no enthusiasms, no foibles encumbered his way. How well he looked at this very moment! When Paulina looked up as he reached her side, her glance mingled at once with an encountering glance, animated, yet modest; his colour, as he spoke to her, became half a blush, half a glow. He stood in her presence brave and bashful: subdued and unobtrusive, yet decided in his purpose and devoted in his ardour.



I gathered all this by one view. I did not prolong my observation—time failed me, had inclination served: the night wore late; Ginevra and I ought already to have been in the Rue Fossette. I rose, and bade good-night to my godmother and M. de Bassompierre.

I know not whether Professor Emanuel had noticed my reluctant acceptance of Dr. Bretton's badinage, or whether he perceived that I was pained, and that, on the whole, the evening had not been one flow of exultant enjoyment for the volatile, pleasure-loving, Mademoiselle Lucie; but, as I was leaving the room, he stepped up and inquired whether I had any one to attend me to the Rue Fossette. The professor *now* spoke politely, and even deferentially, and he looked apologetic and repentant; but I could not recognise his civility at a word, nor meet his contrition with crude, premature oblivion. Never hitherto had I felt seriously disposed to resent his brusqueries, or freeze before his fierceness; what he had said to-night, however, I considered unwarranted: my extreme disapprobation of the proceeding must be marked, however slightly. I merely said:—

“I am provided with attendance.”

Which was true, as Ginevra and I were to be sent home in the carriage; and I passed him with the sliding obeisance with which he was wont to be saluted in classe by pupils crossing his estrade.

Having sought my shawl I returned to the vestibule. M. Emanuel stood there as if waiting. He observed that the night was fine.

“Is it?” I said, with a tone and manner whose consummate chariness and frostiness I could not but applaud. It was so seldom I could properly act out my own resolution to be reserved and cool where I had been grieved or hurt, that I felt almost proud of this one successful effort. That “Is it?” sounded just like the manner of other people. I had heard hundreds of such little minced, docked, dry phrases, from the pursed-up coral lips of a score of self-possessed, self-sufficing misses and mesdemoiselles. That M. Paul would not stand any prolonged experience of this sort of dialogue I knew; but he certainly merited a sample of the curt and arid. I believe he thought so himself, for he took the dose quietly. He looked at my shawl and objected to its lightness. I decidedly told him it was as heavy as I wished. Receding aloof, and standing apart, I leaned on

the banister of the stairs, folded my shawl about me, and fixed my eyes on a dreary religious painting darkening the wall.

Ginevra was long in coming: tedious seemed her loitering. M. Paul was still there, my ear expected from his lips an angry tone. He came nearer. "Now for another hiss!" thought I: had not the action been too uncivil I could have stopped my ears with my fingers in terror of the thrill. Nothing happens as we expect: listen for a coo or a murmur; it is then you will hear a cry of prey or pain. Await a piercing shriek, an angry threat, and welcome an amicable greeting, a low kind whisper. M. Paul spoke gently:—

"Friends," said he, "do not quarrel for a word. Tell me, was it I or ce grand fat d'Anglais" (so he profanely denominated Dr. Bretton), "who made your eyes so humid, and your cheeks so hot as they are even now?"

"I am not conscious of you, monsieur, or of any other having excited such emotion as you indicate," was my answer; and in giving it, I again surpassed my usual self, and achieved a neat, frosty falsehood.

"But what did I say?" he pursued, "tell me:

I was angry: I have forgotten my words; what were they."

"Such as it is best to forget!" said I, still quite calm and chill.

"Then it was *my* words which wounded you? Consider them unsaid: permit my retractation; accord my pardon."

"I am not angry, monsieur."

"Then you are worse than angry—grieved. Forgive me, Miss Lucy."

"M. Emanuel, I *do* forgive you."

"Let me hear you say, in the voice natural to you, and not in that alien tone, 'Mon ami, je vous pardonne.'"

He made me smile. Who could help smiling at his wistfulness, his simplicity, his earnestness?

"Bon!" he cried; "Voilà que le jour va poindre! Dîtes donc, mon ami."

"Monsieur Paul, je vous pardonne."

"I will have no monsieur: speak the other word, or I shall not believe you sincere: another effort—*mon ami*, or else in English,—my friend!"

Now, "my friend" had rather another sound and significancy than "*mon ami*," it did not breathe the same sense of domestic and intimate affection:

"*mon ami*" I could *not* say to M. Paul; "my friend," I could, and did say without difficulty. This distinction existed not for him, however, and he was quite satisfied with the English phrase. He smiled. You should have seen him smile, reader; and you should have marked the difference between his countenance now, and that he wore half an hour ago. I cannot affirm that I had ever witnessed the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness round M. Paul's lips, or in his eyes before. The ironic, the sarcastic, the disdainful, the passionately exultant, I had hundreds of times seen him express by what he called a smile, but any illuminated sign of milder or warmer feeling struck me as wholly new in his visage. It changed it as from a mask to a face: the deep lines left his features; the very complexion seemed clearer and fresher; that swart, sallow, southern darkness which spoke his Spanish blood, became displaced by a lighter hue. I know not that I have ever seen in any other human face an equal metamorphosis from a similar cause. He now took me to the carriage; at the same moment M. de Bassompierre came out with his niece.

In a pretty humour was Mistress Fanshawe; she had found the evening a grand failure: completely

upset as to temper, she gave way to the most uncontrolled moroseness as soon as we were seated, and the carriage-door closed. Her invectives against Dr. Bretton had something venomous in them. Having found herself impotent either to charm or sting him, hatred was her only resource; and this hatred she expressed in terms so unmeasured and proportion so monstrous, that, after listening for a while with assumed stoicism, my outraged sense of justice at last and suddenly caught fire. An explosion ensued: for I could be passionate, too; especially with my present fair but faulty associate, who never failed to stir the worst dregs of me. It was well that the carriage-wheels made a tremendous rattle over the flinty Choseville pavement, for I can assure the reader there was neither dead silence nor calm discussion within the vehicle. Half in earnest, half in seeming, I made it my business to storm down Ginevra. She had set out rampant from the Rue Cr  cy; it was necessary to tame her before we reached the Rue Fossette: to this end it was indispensable to show up her sterling value and high deserts; and this must be done in language of which the fidelity and homeliness might challenge comparison with the compliments of a John Knox

to a Mary Stuart. This was the right discipline for Ginevra; it suited her. I am quite sure she went to bed that night all the better and more settled in mind and mood, and slept all the more sweetly for having undergone a sound moral drubbing.

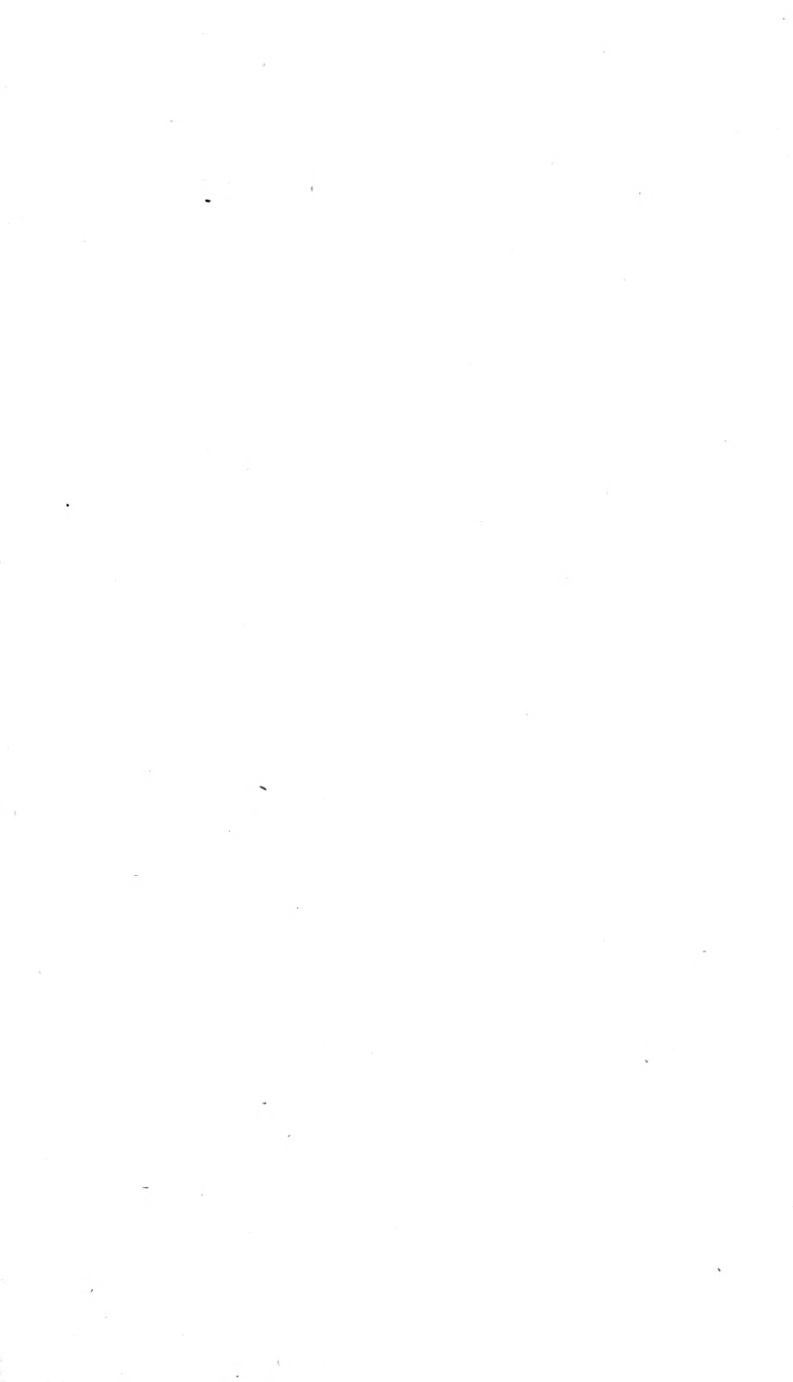
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